

# ASTHMA MANAGEMENT ON FARMS

**A**sthma is a condition of inflammation and spasm of the airways, which can be triggered by a range of factors. In particular, organic dusts such as grains and pollens, can trigger asthma in susceptible people. Farmers with a family history of asthma, can also be at greater risk. As farm families are often long distances from medical help, awareness and treatment of asthma is especially important. Acute asthma is a life threatening condition, but asthma attacks can be prevented.

## SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA



Do you suffer from the following symptoms?

- coughing
  - tightness in the chest
  - wheezing
  - shortness of breath
  - difficulty breathing
- Do these symptoms often occur after exposure to grain or other organic farm dusts?**
- Do symptoms sometimes limit your ability to work effectively? (ie. coughing and shortness of breath with physical exertion)
- Are symptoms worse at night?

## EXPOSURE TO FARM DUSTS

Whilst farmers are not necessarily at greater risk of asthma than other people, farmers are more likely to be exposed to organic dusts in the course of farm work, which can trigger asthma episodes in susceptible persons. Farm dusts are often generated when produce or stock are moved (eg. grain, hay, cattle), or when pollens are released from pasture. They are a complex mixture of organic and inorganic particles derived from pollens, grain husks, leaves, soil, animal and insect parts.



- Are you involved with production, storage, transportation or processing of dusty farm produce
- Are symptoms of asthma (as above) more apparent:**
  - **during grain harvest or haymaking?**
  - **when certain grasses or weeds are in flower such as rye grass or turnip weed?**
- Do you find durum wheat and barley particularly irritating?

### IMPORTANT

ANYONE WITH ASTHMA WHO LIVES OR WORKS ON A FARM SHOULD SPEAK WITH THEIR DOCTOR ABOUT A PERSONAL ASTHMA MANAGEMENT PLAN

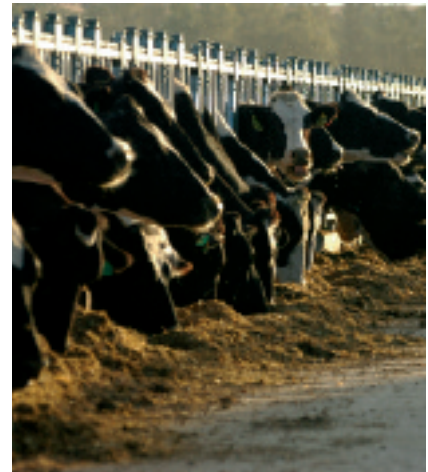
....ALSO, EMPLOYEES WITH ASTHMA NEED TO TELL THEIR EMPLOYER, SO THAT AN ON-FARM MANAGEMENT PLAN CAN BE WORKED OUT

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## ON-FARM ASTHMA MANAGEMENT

Management of asthma includes limiting exposure to organic dusts where possible. Consider elimination and design interventions first, but a range of measures may be required.

- Have you considered changing crops if a family member is seriously affected by asthma due to that crop?
- Can you use pelleted feed rather than dusty grain, or a dust suppressant such as molasses?
- Do you have adequate ventilation in sheds where grain and hay is stored?
- Do harvesters and tractors have cabins that isolate operators from organic farm dusts?
- Are chutes, conveyor belts, grain elevators and intake pits covered to reduce dust?
- Are air conditioners, filters and seals maintained and dusty areas generally kept clean of dust?
- Can you reduce the time spent in a dusty area?
- Do operators and bystanders stand further away or upwind of grain being augered or dumped?
- Are air purifying masks or respirators provided and available to employees for dusty activities?



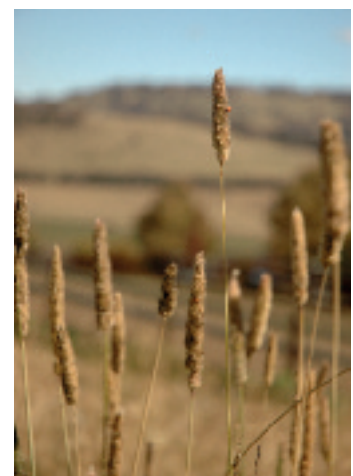
## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

Asthma attacks can develop over a few minutes or a few days. Call 000 immediately if there is:

- Increasing shortness of breath or rapid breathing, with inability to speak more than 1-2 words per breath
- Severe chest tightness
- Feeling of distress or being frightened
- Sucking in of throat and ribs or blue coloration of the lips

While waiting for the ambulance:

1. Sit the person upright and give reassurance
2. Give 4 separate puffs of a reliever (eg. ventolin), preferably with a spacer. Take 4 breaths from the spacer after each puff
3. Wait 4 minutes
4. If little improvement, repeat steps until the ambulance arrives



For farm safety checklists and other information on farm safety risks and controls, go to [aghealth.sydney.edu.au](http://aghealth.sydney.edu.au) or contact:

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PO Box 256 Moree NSW 2400  
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