

*"Management of asthma on farms can make a difference to your productivity as well as your health"*  
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 (Wheat Grower, North Star and Chair of North West Farmsafe)



## ASTHMA MANAGEMENT ON FARMS



SEPTEMBER 2004

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Asthma Educators located at Community Health Centres  
 Contact your local GP to talk about your Asthma Management Plan

## ASTHMA MANAGEMENT CONTACTS

1. Everyone with asthma on farms should have an asthma management plan worked out with their doctor.
2. Employers should encourage their employees to discuss asthma so that an on-farm management plan can be worked out.

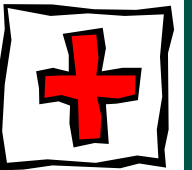
## IMPORTANT

1. Sit the person upright and give reassurance.
2. Without delay give 4 separate puffs of a reliever. The medication is best given one puff at a time via a spacer. Ask the person to take 4 breaths from the spacer after each puff of medication.
3. Wait 4 minutes.
4. If there is little or no improvement, repeat steps 2 and 3 until the ambulance arrives.

### While waiting for the ambulance

- Shortness of breath
- Rapid breathing
- Severe chest tightness
- Being unable to speak more than one or two words per breath
- Distress or feeling frightened
- Little or no improvement after using reliever medication
- Sucking in throat and ribs
- Blue color around the lips
- If you or anyone in your care have any of the above signs, call an ambulance (Dial 000) immediately.

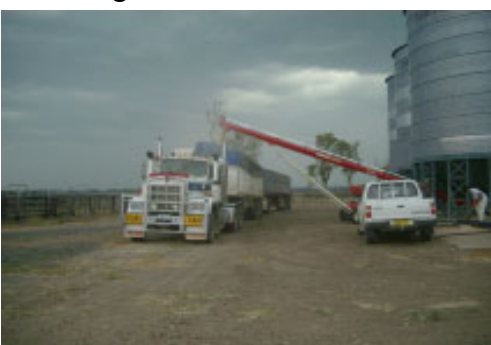
**Recognizing an asthma attack**  
 Asthma attacks can develop over a few minutes or a few days. Signs of an asthma attack include:



## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

## WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

- Many farmers have asthma which is triggered by farm dusts (organic dusts) and pollens—grain dusts, especially wheat dust, cotton dusts, hay, rye grass, turnip weed, and many other farm dusts.
- Many farmers with severe asthma caused by farm dusts may not wish to, or are unable to leave the industry.
- Farm families are usually long distances from medical help when a severe asthma attack occurs.
- Some farmers and farm workers may have a cough or chest tightness and not be aware that they have asthma
- Farm productivity can be effected due to asthma symptoms limiting ability to work effectively.
- Farm employers have special responsibilities that the workplace does not expose workers to significant risk, including risk of asthma.
- Farmers who are on medication may be missing out on new preventative and relieving medication available.



## SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA

Asthma may be an immediate response to grain dust inhalation, may be delayed for several hours, or may reoccur successive nights following exposure. Asthma can be life threatening if left untreated. Symptoms of asthma include:

- wheezing,
- laboured breathing
- coughing.

### Who is at risk:

People involved in production, storage, transportation, or processing of dusty farm produce can suffer the asthma effects of regular inhalation of dusts.

Exposure to farm dust is more evident when produce is moved and especially heavy exposures among many handlers occur during dumping and loading produce.

Dusts from farm produce consist of a complex mixture of organic and inorganic particles from sources as diverse as leaves, soil, and insect parts. The mixture varies with the type of produce, where it is grown, growing conditions and methods of harvest, storage and processing. Dusts of certain grains such as durum wheat and barley are reported to be more irritating than others.



## PREVENTION, CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT OF ASTHMA

When reducing exposure to asthma causing hazards implement the hierarchy of control.

1. **Eliminate the hazard**
  - Change crops if family member has serious or disabling asthma due to particular crop.
2. **Substitute the hazard for a lesser risk**
  - Use pelleted feed rather than dusty grain.
  - Use dust suppressant such as molasses.
3. **Engineering control to reduce exposure**
  - Adequate ventilation systems.
  - Isolate dusty areas eg - cabins on harvesters and tractors.
  - Cover chutes.
  - Enclose conveyor belts in grain elevators.
  - Enclose grain intake pits.
4. **Safer work practices and procedures**
  - Reduction of time spent in dusty area.
  - Provide training and information on identifying dust hazards and how to reduce exposure.
  - Maintain air conditioners, filters and seals as well as general attention to cleaning up dusty area and machinery.
  - Stand further away and upwind of grain being augured and dumped.
5. **Personal Protective Equipment**
  - Respirators: Air purifying masks.
    - Disposable must be replaced daily in very dusty conditions.
    - Mechanical filter: Replaceable filters.