

## **ASTHMA OR COVID-19?**

We know that COVID causes breathing difficulties! But so does an asthma attack? How can you tell the difference?

### **What is Asthma?**

- Asthma is a disease of the airways which causes them to become narrow and inflamed.

### **What are the Symptoms of Asthma?**

- A person with asthma breaths normally except when they are having an asthma attack.
- When having an asthma attack a person may have the following symptoms:
  - Difficulty breathing – Tightness of the chest, a feeling like you can't breathe in fully or panting
  - Wheezing or noisy breathing – particularly a high pitched sound while breathing
  - A cough – especially a dry cough while breathing

### **Aren't these Symptoms Similar to COVID-19?**

- Yes! – there are some common symptoms of COVID-19 particularly: dry cough and shortness of breath.

### **So How Can You Tell if You Have COVID-19 or Asthma?**

- Typical COVID symptoms include a fever and muscle aches and pains. These are not typical symptoms of asthma. Similarly, the wheezing or tightness in the chest are not typical of COVID.

### **So, People with Asthma Don't Need to Have a COVID Test?**

- If your symptoms aren't typical for you or you have a fever, muscle aches and pains or any other COVID symptoms such as loss of taste you should definitely have a COVID test.

### **What Triggers Asthma Attacks?**

- There are many triggers but the most common ones include:
  - Smoke – particularly smoke from bushfires or from cigarettes
  - Thunderstorms – If there is dust or smoke in the air raindrops "scatter" the dust making it easier to breathe in and causing an asthma attack.
  - Allergies – many allergies are caused by things we breathe in such as dust, mould, house mites and pollen. In people with asthma, this could trigger an attack.
  - Stress – when stressed breathing becomes shallower and faster which may trigger an attack.

### **Why is this Particularly Important at the Moment?**

- It has been predicted that this spring/summer will be a high pollen season. Combined with the possibility of thunderstorms, this increases the risk of thunderstorm asthma events.

### **What Can You Do to Help Reduce the Risk of an Asthma Attack?**

- Wearing a face mask is beneficial as it filters out things in the air that may trigger an attack.
- Follow your asthma management plan – speak to your doctor if you don't have one.
- Check the pollen count website (<https://www.melbournepollen.com.au>) for pollen count and thunderstorm asthma forecasts – forecasts will start from 1 October.
- Make sure you have medication on hand – even if you're just going out for the evening.
- If there's a thunderstorm, stay inside and wear a mask – it provides a small level of protection.
- If there's smoke from a bushfire – move to an area where the air is cleaner or stay inside.

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