

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## If You Have Asthma

Exposures associated with animals may trigger increased asthma symptoms such as wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath or a severe asthma attack. Triggers may include dust from feed or bedding, gases from animal waste products or the animals themselves (i.e., hair, feathers, shed skin). Individuals with asthma may have particular problems in the swine or poultry barns or being in the feed mill because these locations are enclosed areas where particulates and gases will be more concentrated than with animals in outdoor settings. Before going into these facilities you should show this handout to your doctor and discuss the advisability of participating in this activity or this course. The more severe your asthma is the more likely you will have breathing problems in facilities where animals are sheltered. Also the more time you spend in these facilities the greater the chance that you may have breathing problems. Examples of severity include a history of hospitalizations or emergency department visits, and/or problems with control of symptoms (daily or more use of a bronchodilator inhaler or waking up at night short of breath).

Possible options your doctor might recommend (not inclusive) are:

- 1) Avoiding entering or spending only a very short time in the facility;
- 2) Wearing a respirator, although in the swine barn you would need one designed for both particulates and gases;
- 3) Upon entering, assuring that you have your bronchodilator inhaler with you in case you have breathing problems;
- 4) Monitoring your symptoms, including peak flow measurements, and leaving the facility if there is an indication of problems;
- 5) Starting or increasing your use of a steroid inhaler for a week before you go into the facility.

If you do experience breathing problems in these facilities you should exit the facility immediately, use your bronchodilator inhaler and seek medical care if the symptoms are not relieved when you leave the facility and use your medication. Student Health Services at the Olin Health Center offers appointments for asthma management and education for currently enrolled students. Appointments can be scheduled by calling (517) 353-4660.

[www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org), the asthma web site of the Michigan Department of Community Health, has useful information both about asthma triggers, and asthma management.



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