



Central Health Board

of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Supreme Council

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Ref: CHB/Bulletin/2011/111

Date: May 4th, 2011

CHB NEWS BULLETIN



FIRST AID (A SERIES OF TUTORIALS)

Tutorial No. 5: Asthma Attack

In an asthma attack the muscles of the **air passages** in the lungs go into **spasm** and the **linings** of the airways **swell**. As a result, the airways become **narrowed** and **breathing becomes difficult**.

Sometimes there is a specific trigger for an asthma attack such as:

- An allergy.
- A cold.
- Cigarette smoke.
- Extremes of temperature.
- Exercise.

People with asthma usually deal well with their own attacks by using a blue **reliever inhaler (salbutamol)**, however you may be required to assist someone having an asthma attack or having an attack for the first time.

Recognition features

- Difficulty in breathing, with a very prolonged breathing-out phase.

There may also be:

- Wheezing as the casualty breathes out.
- Difficulty speaking and whispering.
- Distress and anxiety.
- Coughing.
- Features of hypoxia, such as a grey-blue tinge to the lips, earlobes and nail beds (cyanosis).

Treatment

Your aims during an asthma attack are to ease the breathing and if necessary get medical help.

- You need to keep the casualty calm and reassure them.
- If they have a blue reliever inhaler then encourage them to use it. Children may have a spacer device and you should encourage them to use that with their inhaler also. It should relieve the attack within a few minutes.



- Encourage the casualty to breathe slowly and deeply.
- Encourage the casualty to sit in a position that they find most comfortable, often leaning forward with arms resting on a table or the back of a chair. Do not lie the casualty down.



- A mild asthma attack should ease within three minutes but if it doesn't encourage the casualty to use their inhaler again.

Caution:

If this is the first attack, or if the attack is severe and if any one of the following occurs:

- The inhaler has no effect after five minutes.
- The casualty is becoming worse.
- Breathlessness makes talking difficult.
- The casualty becomes exhausted.

Dial 112 (The Emergency number in Tanzania) for an ambulance or rush to nearest Hospital.

- Encourage the casualty to use their inhaler every five to 10 minutes.
- Monitor and record the breathing and pulse rate every 10 minutes.

If the patient becomes unconscious open the airway and check their breathing and be prepared to give emergency aid. Read the tips on Recovery position and CPR.

“Community’s health – CHB’s priority”