

# ASTHMA TRIGGERS

*A Guide  
for Parents,  
Teachers,  
Doctors,  
and Nurses*



**MOMS**  
*clean air*  
**FORCE**

FIGHTING FOR  
OUR KIDS' HEALTH



## *Welcome*

Lots of our children have asthma—lots of us do, too. Luckily, we've learned a great deal about how to avoid the things that trigger asthma attacks.

We can control some of the things that cause problems in our homes.

But we cannot control the things that pollute our air and aggravate our lungs—unless we raise our voices to demand strong laws to clean our air.

We hope you find this guide to fighting asthma easy to use— it is meant for parents, teachers, doctors, and nurses.

And we hope it inspires you to join us in our work to clean up our air.

# *What is Asthma?*

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that causes repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing. If you have asthma, you have it all the time, but you will have asthma attacks only when something bothers your lungs.

Asthma is a national epidemic, affecting nearly 26 million people, including seven million children—and the numbers are increasing every year.

Asthma is the most common chronic disease in childhood, affecting one in ten American children. It is the third-leading cause of hospitalizations among children under the age of 15.

Children are particularly vulnerable to asthma because their lungs are still developing. Immature lungs respond differently to irritants and pollution than mature lungs do. Also, children breathe more rapidly than adults do, even relative to their size. They take in more air per pound, exposing them to disproportionate levels of irritants and pollutants.





## *See a Doctor*

Asthma is a serious medical condition—as any mom who has watched her child struggle for air can testify.

If you suspect your child has asthma, get prompt medical attention.

If you know your child has asthma, follow your doctor's advice about medications and asthma management.

You can help reduce asthma flare-ups, and cut down on the use of emergency medicines and doctor visits, by avoiding the things that trigger asthma attacks.

# *Triggers at Home*

We spend so much of our day indoors—whether at home, at school, or at work—and that’s where so many asthma sufferers face the things that trigger attacks. The good news is that there is a lot you can do to control asthma triggers indoors.

## *Stuffed animals*

Be sure all soft toys are washed regularly in hot water with gentle detergents.

Keep them clean.  
Wash them frequently, and dry them completely.

Try to store toys on shelves or in baskets, rather than directly on the floor.





## *Pests and pets*

Brush your pets outside.

Bathe them frequently.

Wash hands after petting.

Don't let asthmatic children sleep with their pets.

Vacuum pet hair off floors and furniture.

Keep cages out of bedrooms.

Get rid of *pests* as fast as possible using physical, not chemical, deterrents. Mice and roaches (and the waste they leave behind) can trigger asthma attacks. But so can household pesticides, so get rid of pests by caulking and sealing holes and cracks, fixing leaks, and cleaning up food waste promptly.

Pick up food and water bowls once your pet has finished dinner—so that you aren't feeding pests.

## *Cigarettes*

Lighting up isn't good for anyone—  
and it is especially harmful to asthma sufferers.

Stop smoking! And get help quitting.

## *Dust*

Dust carries dust mites, and the creepy-looking critters  
can trigger asthma attacks.

Be a dust buster: Wipe surfaces with a damp cloth, not a feather  
duster, and wear a filter mask so you aren't inhaling the dust.

Remember to dust and vacuum when the asthma sufferer  
is out of the house. Yes, you should vacuum your furniture.

Pillows get dusty too! Wash your pillows at least once a month  
and avoid feather and down pillows. Wash all bedding weekly  
in hot water to kill dust mites. Use dust mite proof covers on  
pillows and mattresses.

Keep clutter out. Give dust fewer places to hide.





## *Carpets and curtains*

Wood floors are easier to keep clean, so think twice about that fluffy wall-to-wall carpeting.

Shake out and wash small area rugs and curtains regularly.

Vacuum with HEPA bags and filters, which are fine enough to remove the tiniest dust particles.

## *Cleaning products*

Ingredients like ammonium and phthalates can make asthma worse. Fragrances, volatile organic compounds, and flammable chemicals can also irritate the lungs.

Use simple cleaning products whenever possible, such as water, soap, vinegar, or baking soda.

## *Mold and mildew*

Repair the moisture conditions that make mold growth possible—often a leak or inadequate ventilation.

Remove any mold that has grown in your home:  
Wipe mold down with water and light bleach, and fix the conditions that lead to mold growth, or it will just come back.

Bleach is a respiratory irritant, so keep the asthma sufferer far away during cleaning.

Get rid of moldy materials and objects.

For serious mold contamination, consult a specialist for treatment.



## *From Indoors to Out*

There's a lot we can do to keep our loved ones away from the things that trigger asthma in our own homes.

There's only one problem:  
most of us leave home each and every day.

We walk to school, commute to work, and play outside in playgrounds and parks.

For asthma sufferers, the air outdoors carries an overwhelming new set of asthma triggers.

The only way for us to control the air outside our homes is to support strong laws to protect the cleanliness of our air.

And of course, polluted air enters our homes.

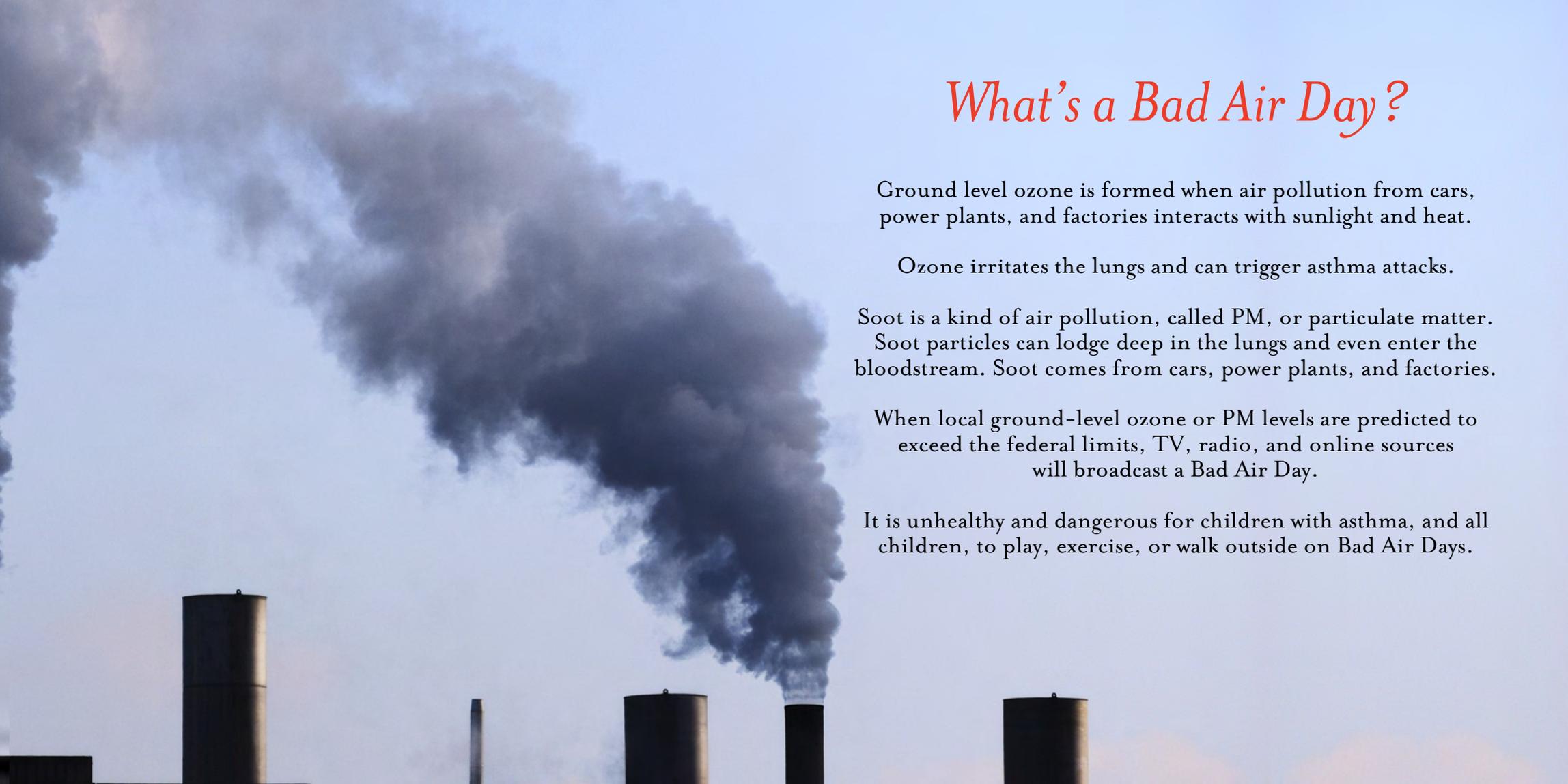
# *Breathing Pollution*

Soot, smog, diesel exhaust, and volatile organic compounds are common outdoor air pollutants.

They come from power plants, factories, cars and trucks, natural gas development, refineries, and forest fires.

Millions of Americans live in areas that still exceed government-established safety levels.





# *What's a Bad Air Day?*

Ground level ozone is formed when air pollution from cars, power plants, and factories interacts with sunlight and heat.

Ozone irritates the lungs and can trigger asthma attacks.

Soot is a kind of air pollution, called PM, or particulate matter. Soot particles can lodge deep in the lungs and even enter the bloodstream. Soot comes from cars, power plants, and factories.

When local ground-level ozone or PM levels are predicted to exceed the federal limits, TV, radio, and online sources will broadcast a Bad Air Day.

It is unhealthy and dangerous for children with asthma, and all children, to play, exercise, or walk outside on Bad Air Days.

# *Let's lead the way!*

We must unite to keep our air pollution laws strong.

We can do our jobs at home, protecting our loved ones from asthma triggers, but outside we share the air.

Don't let pollution keep your children out of the playground.  
Keep pollution out instead.

Support your favorite Clean Air groups, including  
Moms Clean Air Force and Clean Air Council.

[www.momscleanairforce.org](http://www.momscleanairforce.org)  
[www.cleanair.org](http://www.cleanair.org)



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Children's  
Environmental  
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Network