

## **Single Person Spacer Use in Schools & Children’s Services – Q&A’s**

### **What are the changes?**

Effective immediately, The Asthma Foundation Victoria will be recommending that all schools and children’s services adopt a policy of single-person use spacers. This applies to all uses of spacer devices in community settings, including Asthma Emergency Kits, training courses and clinical settings.

### **Why have these changes occurred?**

Spacers are classed as medical devices, and are categorised as single-person use by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC). The NHMRC is a peak advisory body, publishing the *‘Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare’*. Simply put, the guidelines state that if a spacer or mask touches someone’s mouth then, unless you can autoclave it, only that individual should use that spacer and mask again in order to avoid the transmission of infection.

Best practice for infection control is that all spacers are to be used by one person only, and should not be reused by another person, even if it has been washed.

The previous NHMRC guidelines included an exception for community settings and schools, stating that spacers may be reprocessed if cleaned as per instructions. This exception and instructions no longer appear in the guidelines, resulting in a change of policy.

You can download the full NHMRC Guidelines via this link: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/node/30290/>  
Refer to section B1.5 - Reprocessing of reusable instruments & equipment

### **Is it mandatory for our school/children’s service to adopt this policy?**

**Schools:** Single-person spacer use has been included in the recently updated *‘School Policy and Advisory Guide’* (SPAG), Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), for Prep-Year 12, which is:

- Mandatory for Government schools
- Recommended by
  - Independent Schools Victoria
  - Catholic Education Office

The SPAG policies are available online from the DEECD – [www.education.vic.gov.au/spag](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/spag)

**Children’s Services:** Refer to the *‘Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011’*, DEECD (applicable to preschools, kindergartens, out of hours school care, long day care, family day care) Under the children’s services regulations, providers of licensed children’s services must ensure an adequate number of suitably equipped first aid kits are kept on the premises at all times that children are in care. The use of the term ‘suitably equipped’ implies that the contents of the kit follow best practice, which at this point in time includes single-person use spacers.

If a school or preschool makes the decision not to follow this policy, they could be placing students/children at undue risk of infection and may be subject to legal repercussions if an incident does occur.

### **How can we minimise the costs involved with changing over to single-person spacer use?**

Schools and children's services should ensure that students/children with asthma have their own medication and spacer (with mask if under 5 years old) available for use at all times.

Asthma Emergency Kits should only ever be used as a back-up when a child who is known to have asthma does not have their own spacer available, or in the event of a first asthma attack or if the cause of breathing difficulty is unknown. Schools/children's services may choose to adopt a policy where parents/carers are responsible for the cost of the spacer if one must be used from the Asthma Emergency Kit, to minimise the potential for financial burden.

See our Term 3 2012 newsletter inserts for parents/carers advising of the spacer policy change. You may wish to distribute this insert amongst your parent/carer community.

### **What spacers can be used as single-person use spacers?**

All spacers can be used in this manner, and there are a variety of different types and sizes available. When purchasing a spacer, schools and children's services should base their decision on factors relevant to their setting, such as whether small children or students with special needs might need to use it (in which case you need a small volume spacer with a compatible face mask) and cost. The Asthma Foundation of Victoria supplies single-person use spacers in their Asthma Emergency Kits based on lowest cost for effectiveness. At present these are two 'La Petite E-chamber' spacers per kit, and two face masks are included in kits intended for children's services.

### **Does the policy also apply to reliever medication MDI's ('puffers')?**

No. If a reliever medication 'puffer' is used with a spacer, it is not coming in contact with the mouth and therefore can be re-used. However, if a reliever medication 'puffer' is not used with a spacer, then it must also be considered single-person use and cannot be used by another person.

### **What should we do with the spacers currently in our Asthma Emergency Kits?**

Used spacers should be disposed of. If the spacer has never been used, it may be given to the first student/child that uses it, and the spacer should then be replaced in the Asthma Emergency Kit as soon as possible.

### **What can we do with spacers once they have been used from an Asthma Emergency Kit?**

After you use the spacer (and mask) for first aid, you can either give the spacer and any product information to the person who used it (they may keep it as their personal spacer), or dispose of it. When disposing of a spacer, check the manufacturer's instructions to determine whether it should be placed in the recycling bin or garbage.

'La Petite E-chamber' spacers and masks can be used for up to 12 months by the SAME person only. For all other types of spacers, check the manufacturer's guidelines.

A spacer should ALWAYS be available with a reliever puffer for first aid use. Ensure you have a supply of spare spacers to replace in the kit immediately once one has been used.

An Asthma Emergency Kit should always be stocked with two spacers (and two face masks in a children's service).

### **Where can I buy single person use spacers?**

A variety of spacers can be purchased through retail pharmacies.

The Asthma Foundation of Victoria has Asthma Emergency Kits available for schools and children's services to purchase, containing 'La Petite E-chamber' spacers and masks. These spacers and masks are also sold separately. Please note that the cardboard 'Lite Aire' spacers are not compatible with a face mask, and are therefore unsuitable for kits used in children's services.

**Please contact the Asthma Foundation of Victoria for more information, or if you would like to place an order for Asthma Emergency Kits or spacers/face masks.**

**Phone 1800 645 130 or email [schools@asthma.org.au](mailto:schools@asthma.org.au)**