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‘Stock Asthma Rescue Medication’ Legislation Aims to Protect Students with Asthma

CHICAGO – Illinois schools are one step closer to creating a safer environment for students living with asthma. Stock Asthma Rescue Medication in Schools (SB 3015) passed the Illinois Senate unanimously on Wednesday, April 25. A House vote is expected soon.

Since 2001, Illinois students have been allowed to carry asthma medications in school, but what happens if those medications are left at home, run out or are simply unattainable?

Across Illinois more than 330,000 children have reported asthma; however, fewer than twenty-five percent of those children have their asthma under proper control. That means three out of four kids living with asthma are likely to experience symptoms of respiratory distress, leading to increased emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

Children from minority and low-income households are even more likely to face barriers in access to medication and other asthma management resources that can lead to poorly controlled asthma and emergency department visits. Indeed, emergency department visits for asthma in Illinois occur among African American children at nearly six times the rate of visits by White children.

“While current rules allowing students to self-carry and self-administer asthma medications are good first steps, those policies don’t help if a student faces barriers to obtaining medications or simply forgets his or her medication at home,” said Joel Africk, President and CEO of Respiratory Health Association. “Allowing schools to stock asthma rescue medication builds on existing school policies to create a safer environment for all.”

Stock Asthma Rescue Medication in Schools (SB3015) improves access to life-saving medication by allowing schools to stock undesignated asthma rescue medication and allowing school nurses and trained school staff to administer the medication at the first signs of respiratory distress.

“Asthma attacks can occur without warning and because of this, children with asthma should always have access to asthma rescue medication (Albuterol). Asthma rescue medication administration in a school setting allows kids to remain in the classroom and avoids costly emergency room visits. Without this medication, the attack often worsens and can become life-threatening,” said Craig E. Batterman, MD, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Southern Illinois University Medicine.

Asthma causes an estimated 300,000 missed schools days per year in Illinois, which in turn lead to days of work missed by adult caregivers. Asthma medical costs in Illinois are projected to reach \$1.9 billion by 2020.

“Illinois has made great strides in helping children with asthma attend school without the fear that their schools will be unprepared for an inevitable asthma attack,” said State Senator Dave Koehler (D-Peoria). “SB 3015 will help children even more by allowing backup inhalers to be kept at the school, similar to EpiPens.”

Ten other states have adopted similar policies, including Indiana and Missouri. Early results indicate that these policies reduce the need for 911 calls and EMS transports as a result of asthma attacks. Initial data also demonstrate that these policies reach populations of need and improve health outcomes.

“Thankfully, administering albuterol has minimal side effects; however, not treating or delaying treatment of a child experiencing respiratory distress can have dangerous health consequences. SB 3015 will give schools the ability to quickly respond to asthma emergencies and work with students and families to ensure ongoing proper asthma management at school,” said Amy Zimmerman, a Program Director at Legal Council for Health Justice.

Respiratory Health Association and Legal Council for Health Justice worked together to propose a stock asthma rescue medication policy in Illinois. They recently published an issue brief assessing the fit and feasibility of stock asthma rescue medication in Illinois schools, which is available for download on Respiratory Health Association’s [website lungchicago.org](http://www.lungchicago.org).

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Respiratory Health Association has been a local public health leader in Illinois since 1906. A policy leader, our organization remains committed to advancing innovative and meaningful policies and programs to improve the lives of those living with asthma. We have been one of the state’s leading advocates for asthma prevention and management policies and provide asthma management programs for underserved communities. For more information, visit www.lungchicago.org.

Legal Council for Health Justice conducts education, outreach, and advocacy to address discrimination, disadvantage, and disparities in health, wealth, and well-being across the lifespan of vulnerable populations. Through our award winning medical-legal partnerships we target people impacted by chronic, disabling and stigmatizing health and social conditions to empower them to lead fulfilling lives, reach their self-determined goals, and secure and plan their futures. For more information visit www.legalcouncil.org.