

Thunderstorm Asthma - General Framework

1. Statement of Context

The following information has been obtained from publicly available websites which are 'authoritative'.

During grass pollen season (indicatively 1 October to 31 December) people may notice an increase in asthma and/or hay fever symptoms. Grass pollen season increases the chance of **epidemic thunderstorm asthma**. Thunderstorm asthma is **thought to be** triggered by a unique combination of high amounts of grass pollen in the air and a certain type of thunderstorm. For people who are known to be prone to asthma or hay fever and for some people who are not known to be prone, this can trigger severe asthma symptoms. When a large number of people develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time, related to high grass pollen and a certain type of thunderstorm, it is known as epidemic thunderstorm asthma.

The AGSV provides this document outlining the policy requirement as a framework for its member schools.

AGSV Member Schools must ensure that any internal school policies reflect the requirement of the AGSV as outlined in this framework document.

2. Aim

To raise awareness amongst AGSV Member Schools of the **requirement** to comply with this General Framework on epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma.

3. Reference Points / Background Papers

- Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma Guidelines for Victoria
- https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/earlychildhoodupdate/Pages/ecupdate_prepare_your_early_childhood_education_service.aspx
- <http://emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare/#thunderstorm-asthma/preparing-for-thunderstorm-asthma>
- <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/thunderstorm-asthma>
- <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/thunderstorm-asthma/forecasting>
- App. <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/vicemergency/id356559665>

4. Background Information

This background information is provided on an 'as is' basis and reflects the current community information available. Schools are urged to regularly monitor any updates of this community information as part of their normal processes.

The epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecast operates indicatively between 1 October and 31 December. It combines the forecasting of a certain uncommon type of thunderstorm and grass pollen counts across Victoria. The forecast spans three days (today, tomorrow and the day after) and uses a colour-coded scale from low to high risk: green (low), orange (moderate) and red (high).

- A **low risk** (green) forecast means that the elements necessary for an epidemic thunderstorm asthma event are not expected and an event is unlikely.
- A **moderate risk** (orange) forecast means that one of the elements necessary for an event may be present (i.e. a high pollen forecast or a severe thunderstorm storm with strong winds) and there is a moderate chance of an epidemic thunderstorm asthma event occurring.
- A **high risk** (red) forecast means that a high pollen forecast and severe thunderstorm(s) with strong winds are likely to be present increasing the risk of an epidemic thunderstorm asthma event occurring.

Forecasts **are not** a formal 'warning' and are designed to **inform people at risk**, in the first instance and others, that they should be prepared. The forecast only indicates whether the chance of an epidemic thunderstorm asthma event occurring is increased – a higher forecast does not mean that an event is certain to happen, nor does a lower forecast mean that an event will not happen. The forecasting system is not designed to forecast the risk of individual's experiencing asthma and hay fever symptoms, which occur every year during the grass pollen season.

On a day of high risk the relevant authorities will issue up-to-date relevant advice and warnings on the VicEmergency warning platform. For up-to-date pollen levels in each state, check the website here or visit the relevant site: Victoria: AusPollen website or app.

Vic Emergency advises **that everyone in the community should know the signs and symptoms of asthma**, and know the four steps of **asthma first aid** so they know what to do if they or someone is having an asthma attack. The AGSV assumes that member schools will provide that training to staff as part of their student management processes.

Thunderstorm asthma can affect those with asthma or hay fever - especially people who experience wheezing or coughing with their hay fever. All people at increased risk of thunderstorm asthma and those **who have duty of care** for them should:

- learn about epidemic thunderstorm asthma and what they can do to help protect themselves and those in their care during the grass pollen season
- check the epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecast daily
- where possible, ensure that individuals who are prone to asthma attempt to avoid being outside during thunderstorms from October through December – especially in the wind gusts that come before the storm. (Individuals prone to asthma should go inside and close the doors and windows, and if they have their air conditioner on, turn it to 'recirculate')
- ensure they have an up to date asthma action plan (if they have asthma) and have practical knowledge of the four steps of asthma first aid

- have reliever medication appropriately available in grass pollen season and be aware of how to use it (ideally with a spacer)
- be alert to and act on the development of asthma symptoms as explained in their asthma action plan (if they have one), or if they don't, use asthma first aid.
- ensure those who have asthma symptoms see their doctor for advice

5. Policy details

All AGSV Member Schools are required to develop and maintain a Thunderstorm Asthma Policy that complies with the General Framework provided here. Asthma registers must be an integral component of the school policy. These must be kept by AGSV Member Schools, allowing them to identify and communicate with students/parents regarding Thunderstorm Asthma risk.

If and when required, Member Schools must inform the AGSV about students who require a management plan when Thunderstorm Asthma warnings are forecast. This would include but not only, when students from Member Schools are part of AGSV representative teams.

6. Implications for practice

- a) The AGSV must make AGSV Member Schools aware of this Thunderstorm Asthma General Framework
- b) AGSV Member Schools must develop a school Thunderstorm Asthma Policy and sign an annual attestation that the policy complies with this General Framework (see Appendix 2)
- c) The AGSV will monitor the 'public information' relevant to the General Framework and advise Member Schools accordingly
- d) AGSV Member Schools will also monitor the public information and amend their own policies consistent with any changes