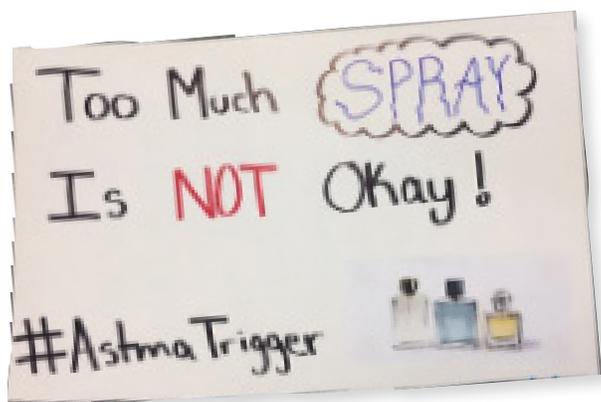


# Don't Let Asthma Take Your Breath Away:

## Working with middle school students to address asthma triggers — A case study from Roswell, New Mexico

The La Casa Family Health Center has a long-standing commitment to addressing the problem of asthma in Roswell, New Mexico. Through a collaboration with the New Mexico Department of Health, they ran the Healthy Homes Asthma Project, conducting over 200 home visits through which they educated families about asthma, ensured they were connected to primary care services, and helped families identify and reduce environmental asthma triggers. Based on this experience, when they had a chance to implement asthma activities at their school-based health center at Mesa Middle School, they jumped at the chance!



The School-Based Health Center (SBHC) at Mesa Middle School is run by La Casa and serves over 400 students. Through an assessment they conducted, school-based health center staff found that many children had been diagnosed with asthma at a young age yet had a low level of knowledge about asthma. Most students were unable to identify or name their medications and unable to identify their asthma triggers. As coordinator, Tillie Crawford, explained, "Our SBHC staff recognizes that New Mexico, especially Southeast New Mexico, has a high asthma rate and it is important to not only treat patients with asthma but also educate them on triggers and identify ones they may not know they have."

Luckily, the clinic has built a great relationship with the principal and school staff, so they had the school's support to conduct student education activities. The clinic staff follow some key principles when conducting student education:

- ▶ Take time to talk with students using pictures and understandable language
- ▶ Let the students talk and ask questions
- ▶ Let the students answer each other's questions and guide them to the correct information
- ▶ Keep parents in the loop, making all materials available to them

"Our SBHC staff recognizes that New Mexico...has a high asthma rate and it is important to not only treat patients with asthma but also educate them on triggers and identify ones they may not know they have."

— Tillie Crawford, School-Based Health Center Coordinator

It's not easy  
being wheezy!  
Make sure to  
keep your **inhaler**  
near by at all  
times.

RELAX  
don't spray too much  
**AXE**  
#AsthmaTrigger 

Take care of your  
lungs, and have your  
inhaler with you  
every day.  
See the **School-  
Based Health Center**  
for more information.  
#AsthmaAwareness  
  
BREATHE

Think before  
you spray  
your **PINK!**  
Acknowledge your  
peers who have  
ASTHMA. Body  
spray can make it  
harder to breathe.  
#AsthmaTrigger

Don't Let  
Asthma  
Take Your  
Breath  
Away  
See the school-based  
Health Center  
Thursdays & Friday's

SBHC staff led 6 education sessions with a group of students, all of whom had been diagnosed with asthma. They covered asthma basics, medications, and triggers. They established asthma management goals and developed Asthma Action Plans. They conducted pre and post-tests to determine whether the education sessions led to any improvements. While some factors are harder to change (there was no reduction in family members smoking, for example), a number of improvements were noted. The percentage of students able to recognize asthma symptoms before an attack increased from 66% to 100%. The percentage of students who have pets sleeping on their bed decreased from 25% to 0%. And, most impressively, the percentage of students who had to go to the emergency department for asthma within the last three months decreased from 12.5% to 0%.

SBHC staff also collected information about asthma triggers to shape additional activities. 50% of students said they have trouble breathing around body sprays or colognes. Yet, lots of middle school students use those products. So, the staff worked with a group of students to develop posters to hang in locker rooms, educating students about the impact of scented personal products on peers with asthma.

Engaging the students in asthma activities—by letting them lead the discussions during education sessions and having them develop posters to educate their peers—proved to be a successful approach. Tillie explains, “The students want to learn about asthma, and what they can do about it, because it affects their day-to-day lives.”

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## Contact

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