



# Asthma in children

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## Key points

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- Estimates of the prevalence of current asthma in children range from 14% to 16%, based on self-report. A higher proportion report recent wheeze and a lower proportion have objective evidence of the airway abnormality that is typical of asthma.
- The prevalence of asthma in children in Australia is high by international standards.
- The prevalence of current asthma is substantially higher among primary school-aged boys than girls. However, among infants, pre-school-aged children, and high-school-aged children, there is no difference between boys and girls in the prevalence of asthma.
- The proportion of GP encounters with children at which asthma is managed as a problem, and the rate of hospital admissions for asthma among children, have both declined since the late 1990s.
- There are large week-to-week fluctuations in the rate of emergency department visits for asthma among children. Rates are up to 50% below the annual average during some weeks of the summer school holiday period. They tend to peak among pre-school and primary school-aged children 2–4 weeks after the end of each school holiday period, particularly during late February. They are also above average during late autumn and winter. These fluctuations are primarily due to respiratory tract infections, the predominant trigger in young children.
- Among children with asthma, infants and pre-school-aged children are much more likely to be admitted to hospital with asthma than older children. However, the majority of admissions in these younger age groups last only 1 day.
- A minority of children with asthma state that they have a written asthma action plan.