



# About Your Child's Spacer

## Parent/Caregiver/Whānau information

Most of the asthma inhalers (puffers) that are prescribed for children need to be used with a spacer.

If you use an inhaler directly into the mouth without a spacer, most of the dose will land in the mouth and throat and be swallowed, and not go into the lungs. The spacer gives space for the spray to slow down, and get taken in gently on the child's breath, so most of the dose reaches your child's airway tubes.

If you use an inhaler directly into the mouth without a spacer, it can also cause oral thrush, teeth problems, and sore throats.

Not all types inhalers can be used with a spacer – check with your doctor/nurse/pharmacist if unsure.

## Choice of spacer device

There are two types of spacers available; small volume and larger volume spacers.

**Small volume spacers** are suitable for children of all ages. A mask should be used for children who cannot seal their lips around the mouthpiece – usually up to 2-3 years of age.

**Avoid mask use for older children** as medicine gets wasted going up the child's nose. **Large volume spacers** can be used over 6 years of age, and may be more efficient at delivering the dose, **but** they are less convenient to carry around



## Using a spacer

The best method for children, or in an emergency, is the **six breath method**:

1. Shake the puffer vigorously to mix the medication and propellant.
2. Insert the puffer into the spacer.
3. Place the mask over the child's mouth and nose or position the mouthpiece in the child's mouth and ensure a good seal.
4. Press once for one puff.
5. Breathe six normal breaths through the spacer, checking that the valve is moving.
6. Remove the puffer from spacer.
7. Repeat the above steps if further doses are required.

*As a quick summary of steps 1-6, to give six puffs, repeat the process below six times:*

**Shake – insert – press once – 6 breaths – remove**

**There is an alternative method for older children and adults involving a breath out before the puff, and a slow deep breath in and 5-second breath-hold after the puff.**

## Care of your child's delivery equipment

### IMPORTANT NOTE

Make sure you have a spacer available for at home and at school.

Replace your spacer with a new one after 6 months of regular use or 12 months of intermittent use. You can get a new spacer from your doctor or pharmacy.

### Care of the spacer

New spacers should be washed before use and then every week.

1. Disassemble large volume spacers, small spacers do not come apart.
2. Wash in warm water with dish-washing liquid detergent in a clean bowl.
3. Remove the spacer and allow to drip dry (Leaving the detergent to dry on the spacer surface leaves a coating that stops the medication from sticking.)
4. Do not rinse or towel dry spacer – the aim is to let the detergent dry onto it
5. Reassemble spacer when needed.

### For the use of a new, unwashed spacer

Prime the spacer with 10 (waste) puffs of the reliever inhaler prior to using it. This will stop the medication from sticking. This step is not required if you have used and washed the spacer before.

## Your MDI/puffer needs care as well

### How can I tell if my MDI/puffer is empty?

Some puffers have counters on them which tell you how many puffs are left, and when it's about to run out. When you shake the puffer, you should be able to feel the medication inside. If you are not sure, spray a puff into the air. You will be able to see and hear the spray coming out of the puffer. If there's no spray or noise, discard the inhaler and use a new one.

If you have not used the MDI/puffer for a week or more, **spray a puff into the air before using it to make sure it's working** properly.

### How to clean the MDI/puffer – *read the product leaflet*

Reliever puffers, like Respigen®, Ventolin®, Atrovent®, Duolin® need to have the plastic case cleaned weekly so that the hole at bottom where the medication comes out doesn't get blocked. They usually come with a spare plastic case, so you can use one while cleaning and drying the other. The recommended process is:

1. Remove the metal canister from the plastic case – the canister should be kept dry
2. Rinse the cap and the mouthpiece of the plastic case under warm running water
3. Shake off the excess water and dry thoroughly with a paper towel
4. When completely dry replace the metal canister and mouthpiece cap

Note 1 Intal Forte® or Tilade® puffers (uncommonly used) should be cleaned daily.

Note 2 Manufacturers of preventer puffers with inhaled steroids such as Flixotide®, Seretide®, Vannair®, etc. state they should not be washed. The mouthpiece and casing should be wiped with a dry tissue. If in doubt, read the product leaflet.