



# MEDWAY ASTHMA SELF-HELP NEWSLETTER – MAY 2020

## DEAR FRIEND OF MASH,

We are living through extraordinary times. We at MASH are thinking of you and your families, as well as the key workers in the NHS, in social care and throughout our Medway community who are working hard to keep us safe and well.

We are as committed as ever to supporting people with asthma and their families, and our support is needed now more than ever. We are managing to keep our service going thanks to our asthma nurse and our coordinator. However, we are having to work in different ways. Our vital clinic is being conducted by phone, where we are supporting more people than ever, and our outreach work is now all online. Please be assured that we can still help you if you or a family member have asthma.

Our financial situation is a worry, though. We are a small charity and we are not able to hold our regular fundraising events.

We hope you will enjoy this newsletter to update you on asthma care and the work of MASH in Medway and we hope to be in touch again soon. In the meantime, stay safe and well.

**Best wishes, Clive Johnson. Chair of MASH Trustees**



Clive Johnson  
Chair of MASH Trustees

## TELEPHONE CONSULTATIONS

It has been some time now since 'face-to-face' clinics have been operational and we have had to change our way of working on an ongoing basis. Before the lockdown, Julie Millest – our asthma nurse – was able to continue consultations by phone from the office, but since the government advised all but essential travel outside the home to stop, she has been conducting telephone consultations from home. This hasn't been without problems, as phone connections are not always good and on a couple of occasions she has had to resort to doing the consultations by email – very time consuming but we made it work.

We have felt that it has been essential that we keep this service open, especially as our colleagues in primary care are so overstretched at this time and people with asthma are not wanting to bother their GP with their concerns over asthma.

One of the main priorities has been to ensure the clients phoning in have a personalised Asthma Action Plan, so that if their asthma does deteriorate they know what to do straight away and can adjust medication accordingly.

Of course, many of our clients have been concerned about the effect COVID-19 might have on their lungs and Julie has been able to talk through these concerns and offer advice.

We look forward to the return of 'face-to-face' clinics as soon as it is safe to do so, but in the interim telephone consultations will be available to any clients (new or those seen before) as required.

**Julie Millest, MASH Asthma Nurse**



**ASTHMA?**  
**We are still  
able to help.**

Get in touch to  
book a FREE  
telephone  
consultation with  
our asthma nurse.

## TESTIMONIAL

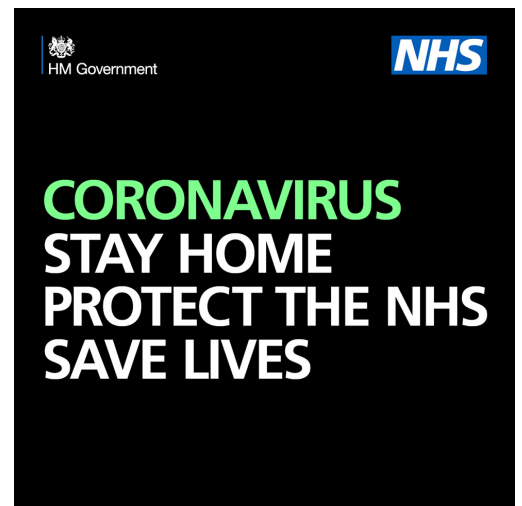
'Always knowledgeable and  
informative. Helped me feel  
more confident in dealing  
with my daughter's asthma.'

# ASTHMA CARE DURING LOCKDOWN

Asthma UK's website is an amazing resource for anyone with asthma. Here are their recommendations for managing asthma and to reduce the risk from coronavirus:

1. **Keep taking your preventer inhaler daily as prescribed.**
2. **Carry your reliever inhaler.**
3. **Download and use an Asthma Action Plan and keep it to hand.**
4. **Start a peak flow diary to track your asthma symptoms.**
5. **Stop smoking – quit now to reduce your risk from COVID-19.**

Adapted from Asthma UK's Coronavirus and Asthma resource:  
<https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/coronavirus-covid-19/>



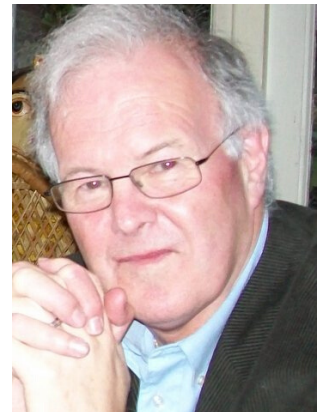
## REMEMBER YOUR PREVENTER

For Muslims the Holy Month of Ramadan began on 24th April. This requires all adult Muslims to fast between dawn and sunset. Many Muslims believe that the use of inhalers for asthma breaks the fast. This is a matter for religious leaders to decide. However, Muslims with asthma who are well controlled on preventer inhalers, taken once or twice daily, can adjust the times of use to after sunset and just before dawn. Reliever inhalers can be used at any time, because the need to use a reliever inhaler means that the asthma is not good, and the user is unwell.

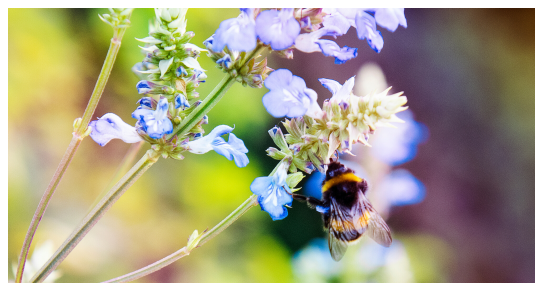
This time for the Muslim community should also prompt all those with asthma to make sure that they have an Asthma Action Plan, that they know which inhalers should be used when and for what reason, and that they know how to use their inhalers. If you have asthma and are in any doubt about any of these things, please consult your GP or a nurse specialist. This is particularly so if you are needing your reliever inhaler more than very occasionally. Although MASH is not providing face-to-face consultations during the COVID-19 emergency, telephone consultations with our specialist asthma and allergy nurse are available.

Although I am now long retired from my career as a hospital-based chest specialist, I often reflect on how much the treatment of asthma has improved in my lifetime. When I started specialist training in the late 1960s, preventer inhalers were just being given trials, and safe reliever inhalers were also new. So if you have asthma, make sure that you make best use of these treatments that have not always been available!

**Martin Farebrother, Vice-chair of MASH Trustees**



Martin Farebrother  
Vice-chair of  
MASH Trustees



### TESTIMONIAL

'I felt so much better after my appointment with the MASH nurse. I recommend MASH to my friends and to people I meet.'

## HAY FEVER

Hay fever is a common allergic reaction that occurs at particular times of the year – it is also known as seasonal rhinitis. Symptoms can include: itchy eyes/throat, sneezing, blocked/runny nose, watery eyes, allergic conjunctivitis, headaches, blocked sinuses, shortness of breath, tiredness and postnasal drip.

Hay fever is a reaction to pollen from grass, trees and weeds during the early spring and summer months. This particular spring we have seen high levels of tree pollen, which for those affected have exacerbated asthma symptoms.

There has also been the added confusion over symptoms of hay fever and those of COVID-19, the main difference being that hay fever doesn't usually come with a high fever.

**...CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

## HAY FEVER CONTINUED...

We would hope that everyone who usually suffers from hay fever will have already started taking their regular hay fever medication, so reducing the risk of hay fever triggering an asthma attack.

Further information about hay fever can be found on Asthma UK and Allergy UK's websites, and our nurse can help via our asthma telephone consultation clinics. MASH's free airborne allergy testing service will resume when face-to-face clinic sessions are able to begin again.

**Julie Millest, MASH Asthma Nurse**



Julie Millest  
MASH Asthma Nurse



## INTRODUCING OUR NEW TRUSTEE, MAGGIE

Hello, I would like to introduce myself as the newest member of the Medway Asthma Self-Help trustee team. My name is Margaret (Maggie or Mags) Cane and I have had asthma since I was a toddler, so appreciate how day-to-day life can revolve around your asthma.

I work full time as manager at Healthwatch Medway, an independent statutory body representing Medway's patients and public in all things related to health and social care.

During this current situation I would like to stress that your GP Surgery is still open and if you or your families do need any kind of medical assistance, please do call them or 111, in an emergency please dial 999.

**Maggie Cane, MASH Trustee**

## EXERCISING WITH ASTHMA DURING COVID-19

For people with asthma exercise is a vital part of disease management, but people with asthma may be worried about if they should discontinue their current exercise regime. Below are a few thoughts on how to keep active whilst not increasing risk to your health in these uncertain times.

If you have asthma and want to engage in exercise, this is great. However, this isn't the time to enter a phase of heavy training. Engaging in heavy training can acutely reduce immune function and opens the window for short-term increase in infection. To reduce this chance when training don't push yourself too hard, maintain hydration, and eat a balanced diet (including fruit and veg).

This also isn't the time to embark on an aggressive, rapid weight loss plan. Take care with calorie restriction at this time.

If you feel symptomatic – don't train!

### How can I exercise regularly, if I have asthma and I am being told to be socially distant?

For those asthmatics who enjoy activities such as cycling, running or walking you should keep up with this. Unfortunately, it will mean not joining groups to enjoy the activity together but at least you can still get out. Going out with a partner from your household can be a good way to keep you both motivated, but until lock down eases best not meet up with a training buddy. When out and about exercising, keep up good hygiene practices, especially when you return home – wash those hands!

**... CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE.**



### TESTIMONIAL

'[Because of my asthma] I was unable to continue running... now

I only have tired legs to worry about when I am running, not the fact that I cannot breathe! ... Keep up the good work!'

## EXERCISING WITH ASTHMA DURING COVID-19 CONTINUED...

There are also plenty of workouts you can do at home. If you are looking for inspiration head to YouTube and you will find various fitness workouts from high intensity training sessions to dance workouts.

If you're not an experienced exerciser then simply trying to make sure your active around the house for regular short bursts of activity 5–10 minutes every hour will help. You can then build this up and maybe even try some beginner fitness workouts that you can find on YouTube.

### How hard should I exercise?

This isn't the time to push yourself for a personal best in the next month or so. Use this time to conduct maintenance training. Regularly exercising is great to maintain your current health status, just make sure you do it keeping in mind social distancing, good hygiene and balanced diet with a good hydration strategy.

Avoid doing back-to-back hard training sessions. As mentioned above, this could lead to acute fall in immune function and open the door to picking up an infection.

## 5 TOP TIPS FOR EXERCISING WITH ASTHMA DURING CORONAVIRUS:

1. **Ensure asthma is well controlled and you are using your prevention inhalers regularly as prescribed.**
2. **Maintain good hygiene, including regularly washing hands and reducing face touching.**
3. **Be mindful of social distancing when exercising.**
4. **Be sensible with exercise intensity, this is not the time to achieve a PB in the next 6 weeks.**
5. **Ensure your diet is well balanced and avoid significant calorie reduction.**

### Useful websites:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/living-with-asthma/exercise-and-activities/>

**John Dickinson, MASH Trustee and Lecturer and Researcher at the School of Sports and Exercise Science, University of Kent**



John Dickinson  
MASH Trustee

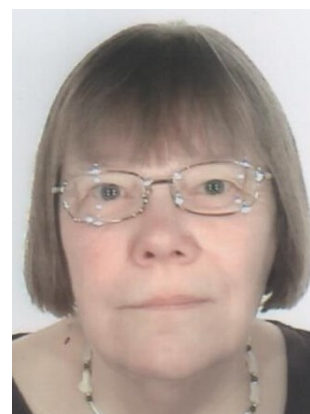
## HOW IS MASH FARING FINANCIALLY?

We are surviving and will continue. Funds we have received for outreach projects have unfortunately had to be put aside for the time being. We are very thankful to the many local Medway councillors who recently donated via their Ward Improvement Funds to help us with asthma nurse training.

We are grateful to the organisations who have donated funds specifically to help us through the next few months, notably the Kent Community Foundation (KCF) Coronavirus Emergency Fund and the Tesco Bags of Help COVID-19 Communities Fund scheme. Recently confirmed donations towards core costs from the Mrs Smith and Mount Trust and the Persimmon Community Champions fund are also very welcome.

We have other bids in process and hopefully we will be successful. But to continue our work in the current coronavirus situation and until we can reopen our premises and continue with our outreach and fundraising plans, there are two ways you could help: a one-off donation or a regular monthly donation. Both of these can be made/set up via PayPal on our website: [www.medwayasthmaselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.medwayasthmaselfhelp.co.uk). Alternatively, you can get in touch with us by email at [medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com](mailto:medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com) or call 01634 855844 to find out more or ask for a regular donation form. Thank you.

**Judith Pender, MASH Trustee and Treasurer**



Judith Pender  
MASH Trustee and  
Treasurer





#### TESTIMONIAL

'Informative and friendly. Clarifies what asthma does and how to deal with it'

## SUPPORT MASH FOR FREE

When you are shopping there are a few ways that you can support MASH at no cost to yourself.

Please remember to use easyfundraising every time you shop online! Over 4,000 shops and sites will donate, so you can raise FREE donations for us no matter what you're buying. These donations really help us, so please sign up if you haven't. You can get started at:

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/medwayasthma/>

We are also supported by Co-op members through the Co-op Local Community Fund. If you are a Co-op member, then you can select MASH as your cause and then you will earn donations for MASH just by doing your shopping! You can sign up here: <https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/38801>

## MASH'S ASTHMA POSTER COMPETITION

With lots of our community plans cancelled and postponed for this summer, MASH is launching an asthma poster competition so that you can help us to raise awareness of asthma. We are looking for some amazing designs that we can use online and in print to help remind people to look after their asthma – so get creative and help us to support people affected by asthma in Medway. We are really looking forward to seeing your submissions.

**PRIZES.** There will be three prize categories and a winner in each category will win a £10 book token. The categories are: 1. Up to 8 years old; 2. 9 to 13 years old; 3. 14 years old and over.

**HOW TO ENTER.** Draw, paint, collage, craft or design on the computer, a poster/picture that tells people about asthma. Then scan or take a photo and email it to MASH (at [medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com](mailto:medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com)) with your name, age and category that you are entering (entries from those under 18 years old need parent/guardian permission). Please note that by sending your entry you are agreeing to the terms and conditions of the competition. You can find these along with more information and some ideas to get you started here: <http://www.medwayasthmaselfhelp.co.uk/poster-competition/>. The closing date for entries is 23:59 on Friday 29th May, 2020.



### Asthma Poster Competition

Feeling creative?  
Help MASH by designing an asthma awareness poster for your chance to win a prize!



## HOW DOES MASH HELP?

MASH supports people and families affected by asthma in Medway. We aim to improve awareness and understanding of asthma, its triggers and treatment, and to empower people with asthma to self-manage their condition. During COVID-19 telephone consultations, our asthma nurse can provide advice and support with asthma – discuss medications, asthma reviews and personalised asthma action plans. Letters containing the advice given and any recommendations will continue to be sent to clients to forward to their GPs.

When face-to-face appointments are able to safely resume, we will again be able to offer spirometry and FeNO testing for asthma diagnoses and monitoring, and airborne allergy testing. **All of our services are free and open to all.**

## KEEP IN TOUCH...

**Telephone:** 01634 855844

**Email:** [medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com](mailto:medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/medway.selfhelp>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/MedwayAsthma>

**Website:** [www.medwayasthmaselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.medwayasthmaselfhelp.co.uk)

The MASH trustees are grateful to our coordinator – Angela Stokes – for putting together and editing this newsletter.



Angela Stokes  
MASH Coordinator

Working to raise asthma awareness and knowledge for the people of Medway

131 Watling Street, Gillingham, Kent, ME2 7YY ~ 01634 855844 ~ [medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com](mailto:medwayasthmaselfhelp@btconnect.com)