



# MEDWAY ASTHMA SELF-HELP NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2020



## DEAR FRIEND OF MASH,

As 2020 comes to an end, we can all reflect on the strange year that has passed. The year has seen sadness, without doubt. But it has also seen a spirit in our community to help others, to face the challenges and to stand with fellow residents. That has been the spirit of MASH from its earliest days and it remains at the heart of what we do.

MASH has been able to maintain its service to our community despite the challenges. Thanks to the hard work of Julie, our dedicated asthma nurse, and Angela, our coordinator, we have managed to move our clinic services online and to the telephone and we have managed to secure funds to keep us going, despite not being able to hold our regular fundraising. The future still looks a challenge for small and locally-focused charities, like MASH, but so far, so good! We must give a special mention for our fantastic volunteer, Wendy, who is well on her way to raising £1,000 for MASH this year at her monthly online quizzes.

At our recent AGM, MASH resolved to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation which puts us on a clearer legal footing and limits the liability of trustees. We also adopted a new constitution. That constitution keeps our members at the heart of our organisation and we are thinking about how we can include our members more in what we do.

MASH is keen to recruit new trustees, especially if you have financial or human resources experience or experience of asthma services. Our current board consists of me as Chair, John Dickinson as Vice-Chair, Judith Pender as Treasurer, Martin Farebrother and Maggie Cane.

We hope you are able to enjoy a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful and Healthy New Year!

**Clive Johnson. Chair of MASH Trustees**



## ASTHMA IN WINTER

Winter is a mixed blessing for those who have asthma. On the one hand, for those with pollen allergy, pollen levels are very low. On the other hand, house dust mites (HDM) thrive in poorly ventilated centrally heated houses, bad news for those with HDM allergy. So it is particularly important for those people to ventilate the house, and especially the bedrooms, and vacuum clean the mattresses and other areas regularly. You can find out more about HDM allergy on Asthma UK's website here:

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/dust-mites/>

Winter is also the season for respiratory infections, frequent triggers of exacerbations of asthma. This year everyone is thinking of Covid-19, but the common cold, viral sore throats and influenza are with us every year. We all hope that those with asthma which is difficult to control will have some priority, as a vulnerable group, for a SARS-Cov-2 (the virus which causes Covid-19) vaccine. Make sure you have it as soon as you are told it is available for your group. You should also have the flu vaccine, if you have not already had it, unless your GP advises you that you should not.

There is some evidence that common colds, viral sore throats, and flu are less common this year so far, probably because of social distancing to prevent the spread of Covid-19. If you do suffer an exacerbation of your asthma, signalled by worsening symptoms and/or an increased need to use your reliever (usually blue) inhaler, increase your dose of your preventer (usually brown) inhaler, if this is in your asthma management plan.

**CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE.**



**ASTHMA?**

**We are still  
able to help.**

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

calling  
**01634  
855844**

## ASTHMA IN WINTER CONTINUED...



## TESTIMONIAL

'Brilliant quality of care, excellent communication, time taken to listen and understand.'

If not, and in any case if this does not help, seek professional advice sooner rather than later. Advice from MASH is available from the Asthma Nurse Specialist, Julie Millett.

Winter is also the season when air pollution tends to be worse, especially hanging around in damp, still and foggy air near main roads. There was a marked reduction in traffic related pollution during the first lockdown in the spring, but levels are now returning towards normal at the worst time of year.

Finally remember that very cold air can be a trigger for asthma. Rushing out in the snow on a frosty morning and inhaling the fresh air deeply seems attractive, but it may be better to stay indoors. Many older people recall even older relatives with asthma going to the Swiss mountains, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, for the 'fresh mountain air', and many who went did improve. It has since been found that HDM does not live above about 2,500 feet (800 metres). And there is less pollution. Which brings us back to the importance of avoiding both these possible triggers if you can.

**Martin Farebrother, MASH Trustee**

## THIS CHRISTMAS IS GOING TO BE VERY DIFFERENT FOR US ALL

As you are preparing for the festivities make sure you are also considering your asthma. Have you got enough medication/inhalers to last you through to the New Year? If not contact your GP for a prescription as soon as you can. If you have one, is your Asthma Action Plan up to date? If it needs updating or you haven't got one - call us at MASH to arrange a telephone consultation.

The best way to keep asthma controlled at times like Christmas is to keep to your asthma routine. This means making sure that your inhalers and other medication are taken regularly and as prescribed.

Consider whether any of these Christmas triggers affect your asthma:

- **Christmas Trees** – If a real Christmas tree has triggered your symptoms before, get an artificial tree. However, watch out for dust on artificial trees and decorations, especially if they have been gathering dust in the loft since last year.
- **Cold Weather** – Changes of temperature, like going from a warm house into the cold, can trigger asthma symptoms. Wearing a scarf or mask helps warm up the air before you breath it in. This is also useful advice when exercising outside.
- **Stress** – We all know Christmas can be stressful and for some people stress can be an asthma trigger. If you know stress is a trigger for you, try to make some time your yourself and get others to take on some of the Christmas workload.
- **Alcohol & Food** – Some alcoholic drinks contain more sulphites and histamine than others, which can trigger asthma symptoms. If these affect you, stick to the drinks you know don't affect you, or perhaps switch to non-alcoholic drinks. If you are allergic or sensitive to certain foods that trigger your asthma remind friends and family about what you can't eat and drink.
- **Open Fires** – Smoke from open fires or wood burning stoves can trigger asthma symptoms. If you're going to someone else's house, remind them that an open fire could be a problem for you.
- **Cigarette Smoke** – Try to avoid smoke by asking friends and family not to smoke during visits.
- **Scented candles** – If you know scented candles are an asthma trigger, let friends and family know not to give you one, and not to burn them when you visit.



## TESTIMONIAL

'Due to COVID19 pressures making it difficult to speak to our medical centre, I am so grateful for MASH being available to give the advice, an action plan and reassurance required.'

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## THIS CHRISTMAS IS GOING TO BE DIFFERENT FOR US ALL, CONT.

### Covid-19 social restrictions this Christmas

Over the weekend, Medway entered the new Tier 4 restrictions and households will no longer be able to join or form a Christmas bubble. Whilst this is disappointing news for so many, please take personal responsibility in helping to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Medway.

You can read more about asthma and coronavirus on the Asthma UK website:

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/coronavirus/>. There are also recommendations for those who are shielding/high risk/clinically extremely vulnerable: <https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/coronavirus-covid-19/shielding-advice-high-risk/>. You can also find additional local coronavirus information and support for vulnerable persons on Medway Council's website: [https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200372/coronavirus\\_covid-19](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200372/coronavirus_covid-19).

Wishing you a happy, safe & healthy Christmas.



Julie Millest, MASH Asthma Nurse



## SUPPORTED BY:

MASH is very grateful to have been supported by many amazing grant-making organisations during this very tough year, including:



## KEEP IN TOUCH...

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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.

