



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

It is estimated that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused 2.8 million deaths worldwide in the last 15 months. However a major study was published recently, concerning the effects of air pollution from burning fossil fuels, which estimates that 8.7 million deaths annually worldwide are caused by this. Most of these deaths are caused by small particulates, a large part of which come from road traffic. The study showed that in the worst affected area, Eastern Asia, 30% of deaths in people over 14 were caused by this; but the next worst area was Europe, with pollution causing 16% of adult deaths. This does not downgrade the importance of the virus pandemic, but it suggests that we ignore the greater problem because it has been with us for a long time.



### Air Pollution and Asthma

We already know that air pollution is an important cause of exacerbations of asthma, and, as has been shown more recently, a cause of asthma. We also know that there was a substantial reduction in air pollution in the UK last year, with reduction of road traffic and industrial activity during the lockdowns and restrictions. A recent study of the UK in 2020, looking at Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) rather than particulates, found an overall reduction of this by 19%. This is estimated to have prevented 3,600 deaths, and 640 asthma admissions.

The fear is that with the end of lockdown, and the easing of social restrictions, during 2021, there will be a resurgence of traffic related pollution levels. Two specific initiatives against this are worth noting, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, and closing roads around schools.



### Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs)

Last May the UK government allocated £250 million to reallocating road space from cars to walking and cycling. Measures include cycle routes, bus lanes, clean air zones, and 20mph speed limit areas. LTNs are being trialled especially in London, where 4% of the population now live in such areas. Studies in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, which has been implementing such zones since 2015, have shown substantial increases in walking and cycling time, a reduction of 7% in car and van ownership, and a 75% reduction in road traffic injuries in these zones. In some areas in London there has been vociferous opposition, mainly from the road lobby, and some schemes have been scrapped. However most schemes are supported by the majority of the populations affected.



### Closing Roads Around Schools

This has also been tried in UK cities, especially London. Roads are closed close to schools during the drop off and pick up periods. In September in the London Boroughs of Brent, Enfield and Lambeth, pollution monitors compared 9 primary schools with closures with 9 without these. There was a reduction of 23% in NO<sub>2</sub> levels near the schools with closures. In another study, driving children to school was down 18%. More than 300 London schools are now protected by such road closures.

There can be no doubt that these improvements will help children and adults with asthma. More detailed studies relating to asthma are awaited.

**Martin Farebrother, MASH Trustee**

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





# MASH IS 25!



## Asthma help for sufferers

A DROP-IN centre for asthma sufferers had its official opening when MP Paul Clark visited on Saturday.

The centre, at 131 Watling Street, Gillingham, offers information to asthma sufferers, their families, health professionals and everyone else who has to deal with asthma.

Mr Clark said: "I am delighted to have this centre in Gillingham. Asthma is a growing problem with around one in three children affected."

"It is particularly appropriate that the centre has opened just as a breakthrough has been announced which may be a one stop cure for asthma, although there still have to be trials."

Opening times are Monday 9am to noon, Wednesday 5pm to 8pm, Friday 2pm to 5pm and Saturday 10.30am to 1.30am.

MASH is 25 years old this year, a milestone none of those involved at the outset could have imagined. MASH evolved from a previous initiative in Gillingham, 'Health for All', where several health issues were addressed. At the start, we were a bunch of health professionals, people with asthma and carers of people with asthma who organised to improve asthma information locally as a charity led by our first chairman, Brian Urwin, and a steering committee from the West Kent Health Authority.

Money was sourced to open the asthma centre from two sources: The National Lottery and the West Kent Health Authority Charity Fund. Both bids were successful and the premises were rented in Watling Street, with two part-time employees – a coordinator and an asthma nurse.

Over the years MASH has evolved, but it has kept its core values of providing information and support to our core users and raising asthma awareness in the public. This has been achieved with the weekly advice sessions, outreach events, newsletters and, more recently, the use of social media.

MASH has also participated in special projects, mostly with partners. These include a puppet workshop with schools, which ran for about two years and resulted in a continuing interest in asthma in the school setting. Continuing the theme of this newsletter, it is also worth mentioning various air pollution projects with the Natural Resources Institute using data from the three pollution monitoring sites in Medway and input from school children and people who drive for living. Another project was with a Kent Warm Homes Initiative aimed at suitable ventilation and mould reduction to provide healthier homes. In the last two years, thanks to the generosity of Bedfont Scientific Ltd, we have been able to add FeNO monitoring to our services.

Throughout the years, MASH has been the beneficiary of various grants and donations that have enabled us to continue our work in Medway, and none of this would have been possible without the involvement of dedicated employees, trustees and many volunteers.

Looking forward to the future, MASH would welcome ideas and volunteers to continue our efforts and for MASH to continue to provide this service as long as it is needed.

**Judith Pender, MASH Trustee**

## TELL US HOW MASH CAN SUPPORT YOU

MASH wants to find out how we can best support you and everyone affected by asthma in Medway as we move forward into the post-covid world. Let us know how Covid-19 has affected you; tell us about the issues you are facing; and highlight the support or services you need. Your voice can help us improve our work and services, and help us to campaign for the support, services and issues that are important for people with asthma in Medway.

Send us an email or a letter to the addresses below, fill in our online questionnaire (<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BDWZQSC>) or join us and Healthwatch Medway for a chat online on World Asthma Day – Wednesday 5th May at 12.30pm. To register and for details on how to attend our online asthma chat, please email: [debbie@healthwatchmedway.com](mailto:debbie@healthwatchmedway.com).

**Do you have asthma?  
Do you care for someone with asthma?**



## 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 newsletter is put together and edited by Angela Stokes, MASH Coordinator**

# MASH'S KIDS CORNER

If you need support with your child's asthma, then MASH can help. Get in touch to book an appointment with our asthma nurse.

We would love to see your colouring in. Why not send us a picture of your fantastic efforts and tell us all about how you are looking after your asthma. You can download our asthma comic here: <https://tinyurl.com/kx7e9y32>. Enjoy!



**CAN YOU SPOT THE 5  
POTENTIAL ASTHMA TRIGGERS?**

