

# Stock Albuterol in Montana K-12 Schools

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: What is albuterol and what does it do?**

Albuterol is a quick relief medication used to treat or prevent bronchospasm (asthma attacks) in patients with asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, and other lung diseases. It works by relaxing smooth muscles in your airways to open air passages to the lungs and make breathing easier.

### **Q: Is albuterol dangerous? Can albuterol be abused?**

Albuterol is generally safe when used as prescribed. Albuterol does not produce a “high” like other stimulants, the potential for abuse is relatively low. Side effects of albuterol can last 2-6 hours depending on dose.

Common Side Effects Include:

- Tremors or Shakiness
- Increase Heart Rate (Tachycardia)
- Nervousness or Anxiety
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Mild Insomnia

More-serious – though less common – side effects include a rapid heart rate, called tachycardia, or feelings of fluttering or a pounding heart, called palpitations.

### **Q: What would the cost be to a school?**

Estimates from states that have successfully implemented stock albuterol in schools legislation show that the average cost of procuring a stock albuterol inhaler and disposable spacers can range from \$25 to \$100 annually. A single albuterol inhaler contains approximately 200 actuations or doses.

### **Q: What is the cost of uncontrolled asthma in Montana among school aged children?**

There were 3,637 emergency department (ED) visits for Montana children aged 5-18 years in 2023 with an average charge of \$1,474 per visit. Additionally, there were 58 hospitalizations among Montana children with asthma with an average charge of \$16,309 per hospitalization. This does not include emergency medical services transportation costs or financial impacts for parents/guardians who miss work time (ED/HDD, 2023).

### **Q: My school is interested in implementing stock albuterol, but cost is an issue. Is there funding or support available for schools?**

There is no current funding source to support the purchase of these supplies. Schools/school systems are encouraged to contact local pharmacies, healthcare providers/organizations, parent teacher coalitions, or other local organizations that may have programs or resources available. No discount or free inhaler programs currently exist.

**Q: Are schools mandated to participate in stocking albuterol?**

No, schools are not required to carry or administer stock albuterol. The law simply provides authorization for schools to stock and administer albuterol if they so choose. Equally important, the law indemnifies the school district or nonpublic school against liability as a result of any injury arising from the administration of stock albuterol to a student or nonstudent.

According to Montana Administrative Rule [37.111.825](#), schools are required to develop and enforce policies on first aid which include procedures to be followed in the event of accidents, injuries, or chronic disease exacerbations, such as an asthma attack.

**Q: Schools carrying stock albuterol are required to identify and train staff who would be willing to administer stock albuterol in an emergency situation. What trainings exist or who would provide these trainings?**

Asthma education training can be provided by a school nurse, certified emergency responder, certified asthma educator, or other health care professional. A recommended asthma education program includes the most recent version of the self-paced online “Creating Asthma Friendly Schools” education program created by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and housed on the Montana Office of Public Instruction’s Teacher Learning Hub. Course link: [Asthma Friendly Schools | Learning Hub \(mrooms.net\)](#). Authorized personnel shall complete training annually.

By law, DPHHS is responsible for approving training curricula developed or chosen by schools deciding to carry stock albuterol. Proposed asthma education programs can be emailed to [asthma.mt.gov](mailto:asthma.mt.gov) for review. Additional information will be include in the implementation guide created by DPHHS.

**Q: Does the law require that a school nurse administer stock albuterol medication?**

Administration of stock albuterol is not limited to school nurses. Any properly trained and authorized school personnel may administer albuterol in the event of respiratory distress. If the school or district employs a nurse or contracts with a nurse for school nursing services, the school nurse should be involved in protocol development and administration of stock albuterol when possible.

**Q: How can my school obtain a prescription for emergency medication?**

Similar to stock epinephrine, schools may acquire a prescription from a licensed physician, advanced practice registered nurse, or physician assistant. The school would be identified as the patient.

**Q: Who will be responsible for procuring and maintaining albuterol?**

A school or district may determine who is responsible for procuring albuterol. This may be assigned to the school nurse if the school or district employs a school nurse. If there is no school nurse available, the school or district administrator may assume this responsibility or assign it to another willing staff member.

**Q: What communication will parents/guardians receive?**

Schools choosing to carry stock albuterol must inform parents/guardians about the potential use of stock albuterol medication in a respiratory distress emergency. The school's stock albuterol protocol must be available upon request. If any medication is administered to a student by school personnel, parents/guardians should be notified immediately in accordance with school protocol.

*\*Parents/guardians can be given the opportunity to opt out on behalf of their child if they would like to do so.*

**Q: What should be included in a school stock albuterol medication protocol?**

The protocol should include:

- School employee training requirements and approach
- Storage protocol and location of the stock albuterol medication
- Immediate and long-term follow-up protocol for the administration of the medication, including determination for when to make a 9-1-1 emergency call.

**Q: Does a school carrying stock albuterol replace the need for parents/guardians to ensure the student has their own albuterol medication with them during the school day?**

No, stock albuterol does not relieve the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide their child's prescribed medication/inhaler for use at school or create an expectation that a school will have stock albuterol available. Stock albuterol is only intended to be used in cases of perceived respiratory distress when an individual does not have access to their personal inhaler medication, or an individual does not have a diagnosed condition or prescribed medication. Montana Code Annotated 20-5-420 allows students with asthma, severe allergies, or anaphylaxis to carry and self-administer their medication at school, including before, after, and during school activities. The Montana Asthma Control Program maintains a combination asthma action plan and [Asthma Medication Self-Carry Authorization form](#).

**Q: Will there be any required reporting for implementing stock albuterol?**

By law, schools must report individual uses of stock albuterol to MT DPHHS within three days of use. In addition, an annual report summarizing the use of stock albuterol during the school year must be submitted to DPHHS. A reporting platform is to be developed by DPHHS. Reporting information will be kept to a minimum and no personally identifiable information will be collected.

**Q: What would an annual report to DPHHS include?**

An annual report includes the number of times stock albuterol was used during the school year and a summary of outcomes, including the number of times students returned to class, were sent home, or required emergency medical service transport to the emergency department.

**Q: Where can I find example policies, communication tools, and other resources related to stock albuterol implementation?**

The Montana Department of Public Health is developing a stock albuterol in schools implementation guide, which will be housed on the DPHHS school health website. This guide will include example policy language, communications tools, and other resources.

**Q: Will schools be allowed to administer stock albuterol at school sponsored events outside of normal school hours?**

Schools/school districts are allowed to determine their own policy for when they would authorize the use of stock albuterol. The law states that schools have the ability to make stock albuterol available at any school sponsored event regardless of the time of day.

**Q: Does this legislation allow for the administration of albuterol to school staff and visitors?**

The legislation allows schools to administer stock albuterol to any child or adult experiencing respiratory distress on school grounds or at a school sponsored event. This includes school staff or visitors. However, schools can make the determination in their policies as to whom stock albuterol may be administered.

**Q: Are childcare settings included in the legislation?**

No, at this time, the legislation only applies to elementary and secondary public and private school settings.

**Q: Can the same inhaler be used on multiple students?**

One inhaler can be used for multiple people if spacers are used. A spacer is a tube-shaped device that attaches to an inhaler to help deliver inhaled aerosolized asthma medicine. They are also known as holding chambers. Spacers prevent cross-contamination between users and they can make it easier for non-medical staff to administer the medication correctly in an emergency, as the spacer removes the need for perfect inhaler technique. Multiple-use spacers can be washed and sanitized. Disposable spacers are also available. Anyone can purchase spacers online, though in some cases a prescription may be required.

**Q: How should the stock albuterol be stored?**

The stock albuterol inhaler should be kept in a safe, but unlocked place. Do not lock this medication as it may prevent its use during a respiratory emergency.

**Additional Storage Tips:**

- Store your albuterol inhaler at room temperature, ideally between 68°F and 77°F.
- Always replace the cap after each use to prevent dust and moisture from entering the mouthpiece.
- Avoid storing the product in a place with direct sunlight, high temperature, or where there are changes in humidity.
- Do not keep outdated medicine or medicine no longer needed.

**Q: How do I clean spacers/valved holding chambers?**

To properly clean and store a spacer/valved holding chamber for albuterol, disassemble the chamber according to the package instructions, wash all parts in warm water with dish soap, rinse thoroughly, and air dry completely before reassembling. Store the reassembled chamber in a cool, dry place when not in use.

**Q: Can I use the stock inhaler on an individual who doesn't have asthma?**

The stock albuterol inhaler can be used on both individuals with previously known asthma and unknown asthma. The law states that stock albuterol may be used for the treatment of respiratory distress, defined as a person's inability to breathe adequately, including the perceived or actual presence of associated symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath.

