

Single person use of spacers and masks in Asthma Emergency Kits (AEKs) - Frequently Asked Questions

Why are spacers and masks supplied in Asthma Emergency Kits?

Spacers should always be used with puffer medication. This is true for first aid and routine use of puffer medication. This is because:

There are fewer side effects of the medication

It is easier to use as it requires less coordination than a puffer alone

More medication is inhaled into the lungs.

A mask is supplied for use with young children and others who have difficulty taking their medication to help make sure all the medication is taken effectively.

Why are there 2 spacers (and masks) in the AEKs?

Spacers and masks can only be used by one person. You should always have a spare in your AEK.

Why can spacers and masks only be used by one person?

Asthma Australia recommends that spacers should be used by one person only (ie single person use as opposed to single use). This recommendation is based on NHMRC Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection Healthcare (2010) which advises that medical devices that come into contact with mucous membranes or non-intact skin should be single use or sterilised after each use. To avoid the requirements of sterilisation or the need to discard spacers (following single use), Asthma Australia guidelines recommend that a person is allocated their own spacer that should not be shared, and that a replacement spacer be immediately available for an Asthma Emergency Kit following spacer use in an emergency. This matches the product advice on spacers and masks.

This avoids infection transmission via mucus. While the risk of transmission is small, first aiders must always follow infection control instructions.

Does that mean spacers and masks must be thrown away after they have been used?

No. Best practice infection control means a spacer or mask should only be used by the same person. That person can re-use the spacer/mask. Some schools and children's services put the name of the child who has used the spacer on the spacer/mask and either keep it on site for their future use, or give it to them to take home.

What spacers can be used as single person use spacers?

All spacers.

Please note that the cardboard spacers cannot have a mask attached to them, so they are not suitable for kits used with children under 5 years.

What do I do with our current spacers and masks in AEKs?

Unused spacers and masks can be used for the next person requiring it, and can then be given to that person, to be replaced in the AEK with a new spacer.

Previously used spacers should be disposed of thoughtfully (e.g. Can it be recycled?)

What do I do with spacers once they have been used from an AEK?

After you use the spacer for first aid you can either give the spacer and any product information to the person who used it for them to use in the future or dispose of thoughtfully.

Product information will tell you how long the same person can keep using a spacer or mask: typically a cardboard spacer can be used for up to 7 days by the same person (sooner if it becomes crushed, soggy, contaminated or discoloured); plastic spacers and masks can be used for up to 12 months by the same person.

Where can I buy single person use spacers?

A variety of spacers can be purchased through retail pharmacies and from the Asthma Foundations.

Remember that AEKs are first aid equipment: ideally people will have their own, named medication and spacer/mask for use in an emergency. Encouraging families and/or employees to follow this practice will enhance their health and safety – and minimise cost for education and care settings and in the workplace.

Who helped Asthma Australia develop this policy?

Asthma Australia sought legal, policy, industrial and community advice. We started with National Health and Medical Research Council and Therapeutic Goods Administration guidelines and product manufacturer instructions. We checked with key government departments and authorities including the Commission for Health Quality and Safety; our own National Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee; and key community groups, for example parent bodies and representatives of school principals.

For more information, contact your local Asthma Foundation — **1800 ASTHMA** (1800 278 462)