

FALL FOR THE

Breathe easy at home program

Volume 6, Issue 4

Fall/Winter 2013

City of Boston's Office of Civil Rights

Boston's Office of Civil Rights' Fair Housing Commission wants our Breathe Easy At Home Partners to know about reasonable accommodations and modifications in housing as it relates to individuals with asthma.

The Fair Housing Act defines an individual with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a record of such impairment, or a person regarded as having such an impairment. The term major life activity may include seeing, hearing, walking, eating, caring for one's self, and breathing, as is the case with asthmatics. To be "substantial," the impairment must be severe and predictably long-term.

A **reasonable accommodation** is a change which can be made to rules, policies, practices, or services that will afford a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to the housing or programs. A **reasonable modification** is a structural change made to existing premises occupied, or to be occupied by a person with a disability, in order to

afford full enjoyment of the premises. A reasonable accommodation/modification can be requested at any time.

Since reasonable accommodation/modification requests relate specifically to a person's disability, requests should be handled on a case-by-case basis in relation to that disability. Landlords should engage in an interactive process with the household in a reasonable amount of time. While requests do not have to be made in writing, some Landlords require that the household complete a written request to provide further details. Landlords may not ask about the nature or severity of a disability, but can request a doctor's letter to verify that the accommodation or modification requested is related to the disability.

Accommodation requests for persons with asthma might include requesting the Landlord adopt or enforce a no-smoking policy in common areas, requesting the removal or limitation of carpeting such as to control allergy triggers, or requesting a change in cleaning products used to ones with



less harsh chemicals and odors.

It is illegal to discriminate in the rental of, sales of and lending in housing, or retaliate for exercising one's legal right to request a reasonable accommodation. All properties are covered by fair housing law, with some exceptions. The Boston Fair Housing Commission is available to assist with in all matters related to fair housing law occurring within the City of Boston.

Boston Fair Housing Commission
Office of Civil Rights
1 City Hall Square, Room 966
Boston, MA 02201-2024
617.635.2500

Flu Season Reminder

As you know, getting the flu vaccine is the most effective way to prevent the flu. Having asthma increases the risk of complication from the flu virus. Asthma is one of the most common medical conditions among children and adults hospitalized with the flu. Asthma causes airways to swell and increases their sensitivity. The flu virus can increase the inflammation of the airways and lungs. This can lead to pneumonia and other acute respiratory diseases. For general information about the flu and flu clinic schedules for your patients, please visit the Boston Public Health Commission's website:

<http://www.bphc.org/programs/infectiousdisease/infectiousdiseasesatoz/influenza/flu vaccinefinder/Pages/Home.aspx>



Smoking Cessation



The American Cancer Society marks the Great American Smoke Out on the third Thursday of November each year by encouraging smokers to use the date to make a plan to quit, or to plan in advance and quit smoking that day. By quitting—even for one day—smokers will be taking an important step towards a healthier life—one that can lead to reducing cancer risk.

Tobacco use remains the single largest preventable

cause of disease and premature death in the US, yet about 43.8 million Americans still smoke cigarettes—Nearly 1 in every 5 adults. As of 2010, there were also 13.2 million cigar smokers in the US, and 2.2 million who smoke tobacco in pipes—other dangerous and addictive forms of tobacco.

(www.cancer.org/healthy/stayawayfromtobacco/greatamericansmokeout/index).

It's not too late!

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health sponsors the Massachusetts Smokers Helpline which provides quit coaching by telephone. Call 1-800-784-8669 for this free service. For patients with MassHealth and Commonwealth Care cover stop smoking medicines and counseling. Go to <http://makesmokinghistory.org/quitting.html> for further information on health insurance coverage for quitting.

HEATING SEASON!

According to the Massachusetts State Sanitary Code, residential dwellings must be heated from September 15th until June 15th each year. Heating systems must be capable of providing heat that meets a minimum temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit from 7:00am to 11:00pm and 64 degrees Fahrenheit from 11:01pm to 6:59am.

Heating Assistance

Consider energy efficiency programs funded by gas and electric rate payers and offered through public utilities. Go to www.masssave.com or call (866) 527-SAVE. Free energy audits and incentives for insulation, Energy Star lighting, appliances and heating systems are among the services that may be offered.

LIHEAP Fuel Assistance Program: Beginning November 1st, homeowners and tenants can apply for fuel assistance based on income eligibility through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program ("LIHEAP"). Fuel assistance provides payments to energy providers to defer some of the costs of monthly heating bills. Call (800) 632-8175 or visit www.winterheating.com for more information.

Salvation Army Good Neighbor Fund: To apply or learn about eligibility, call (800) 262-1320, (617) 542-5420 or visit www.magoodneighbor.org.

Oil Co-ops: They are buying groups formed to help consumers purchase energy at lower costs. A list of oil co-ops in the state is available at www.mass.gov/doer as part of the fuel assistance tip sheet or you may contact DOER at (800) 351-0077.

Shop Around: If you heat by oil you should avoid letting the tank go below ¼ full, and you should contact at least 3 oil dealers to obtain the best price. Some oil dealers will allow you to lock in at a low price provided that you meet their requirements.

Gas/Electricity Discount Rates: Income eligible applicants may take advantage of discounted rates and protection against service termination. Look into arranging winter payment plans with gas and electric utilities.

Citizens Energy Oil Assistance Program <http://www.citizensenergy.com/main/Home.html> to apply to the Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program, please call 1-877-JOE-4-OIL (1-877-563-4645).

For ABCD Neighborhood service centers, visit: <http://www.bostonabcd.org/service-centers.aspx>

BREATHE EASY AT HOME <http://www.cityofboston.gov/isd/housing/bmc>