

# Try to stay cool with the

## Breathe easy

at home program

Try to stay cool with  
BEAH!

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### Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) & BEAH

Dear Breathe Easy Providers, You can now refer your patients with Sickle Cell Disease to the program. As you know, individuals with SCD experience a number of symptoms, the most challenging of which are unpredictable episodes of debilitating pain. These pain episodes can lead to hospitalizations and have life-threatening consequences. Pain episodes are caused by a number of factors, including cold and hot temperatures, airway obstruction/irritation, overexertion, and dehydration. Any type of physical stress—whether it is caused by illness, injury, or the environment—or psychological stress can cause a pain crisis. SCD causes inflammation throughout the body, including the lungs. When sickling occurs in the chest, individuals with SCD can

experience something called Acute Chest Syndrome (ACS). Each episode of ACS damages the lungs and can increase airway sensitivity. This makes future episodes of ACS more severe, leading to potentially life threatening respiratory conditions. Many common airway irritants that trigger asthma attacks can also trigger SCD pain episodes and lead to ACS. About one third of people with SCD also have asthma, which further increases their susceptibility to environmental triggers and the potential life-threatening respiratory conditions that may result. Even those with SCD who do not have a diagnosis of asthma have some degree of airway inflammatory disease, and so they too are at risk of severe consequences when exposed to environmental triggers. There are several links between poor housing

conditions and health outcomes for people with SCD. The best known of these are heating-related issues, as exposure to cold is a frequent pain episode trigger. Another common trigger is environmental exposures to irritants such as mold, dust, and infestations. These irritants prevent lungs from working properly, reducing the amount of oxygen in the blood. This lower level of oxygen leads to more frequent and more severe sickling and thus more pain episodes. With proper support and environmental conditions, however, many pain episodes can be prevented or reduced in severity, and individuals with SCD can lead fuller and more productive lives.

*From the Medical-Legal Partnership Boston and Boston Children's Hospital.*

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#### Special points of interest:

- Now, you can screen patients with SCD for a Breathe Easy inspection, also!
- The Rental Ordinance and your patients
- Breathe Easy at Home has been published!
- Back-to-School tips for children with asthma and sickle cell disease

### What the New Rental Ordinance Means for Your Patients

The Rental Registration & Inspection Program requires the annual registration of all private rental units and the inspection for all non-exempt rental units to be conducted every five years. This year the registration period begins on May 1, 2013 and ends on August 1, 2013. The initial registration fee is \$25/unit. Failure to register will result in fines and further

enforcement actions. Benefits:  
 1) Educate owners on State and local housing codes.  
 2) Provides owners with a written record of the conditions of the property.  
 3) Ensures rental units meet minimum Housing Code Requirements.  
 With the goal of ensuring a healthy and safe housing environment for Boston rent-

ers, the ordinance serves to greatly benefit your patients. For more information or to register go to:  
[www.cityofboston.gov/isd/housing](http://www.cityofboston.gov/isd/housing),  
 email: [rentalprogram@cityofboston.gov](mailto:rentalprogram@cityofboston.gov)  
 or  
 call 617-635-1010





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## Collaborative Meeting on Safe & Healthy Housing

Breathe Easy has been published! Please see our Guest Commentary posted on the Asthma Community Networks (ACN) website. Register with ACN and see their Resource Bank to access the Commentary: <http://asthmacommunitynetwork.org/>

In May, as preparation for the Annual Collaborative Meeting on Safe & Healthy Housing, 55 of the Lead and Environmental Hazards inspectors of the Boston Public Health Commission; Housing inspectors from Inspectional Services; and managers and supervisors from the Boston Housing Authority met for a collaborative training on Integrated Pest Management. In June, they came together again. Ninety-nine participants heard presentations on housing conditions that affect health. The Medical-Legal Partnership Boston presented about the effects of asthma triggers on patients with sickle-cell disease (SCD) and Boston Medical Center's Children's HealthWatch presented about how housing insecurity and food insecurity compound as health risks for patients with asthma and other chronic health problems.

## New Asthma Director

Please join Breathe Easy in welcoming the Boston Public Health Commission's new Director of Asthma Prevention and Control; Anjali Nath!

Anjali is from the East Coast and graduated from Tufts University (1999) and the Boston University School of Public Health (2003).

Anjali served for seven years as Director of Asthma Programs

with the Breathe California Golden Gate Public Health Partnership in Daly City California.

Before moving to California, Anjali worked in Massachusetts as the Boston Area Tobacco Coalition Coordinator with The Medical Foundation (now Health Resources in Action), the North Shore Area Tobacco Coalition Coordinator with the Massachusetts Prevention Center and a Substance Abuse Peer Leader Program Director

with Girls, Inc. of Lynn.

Clearly, Anjali's dedication to environmental health, tobacco prevention and asthma gives her a special investment in the work of the Commission and we are excited to have her aboard!

When she's not working, Anjali enjoys balancing an active and healthy lifestyle with performing and teaching Kathak, North Indian classical dance.

## School Preparation Tips

### Schedule Check-up Doctor's Appointment

Even if your child's asthma or SCD is well managed, scheduling a check up with your pediatrician is critical to ensuring your child's condition(s) continues to be effectively controlled. This is also an opportunity to evaluate medications and physical activity restrictions.

### Confirm Medicines Are Up-to-Date and Fill Prescriptions

If your child uses an inhaler, ensure you have a current prescription for an HFA inhaler. Check your medicine cabinet to ensure your child's prescriptions have sufficient refills available and have not expired.

### Know About Prescription Assistance Services

No one should have to do without their asthma medications because of financial need. Two organizations are available to help. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can be reached by calling 1-888-4PPA-NOW.

Rx Outreach also provides information on their website: [www.rxoutreach.com](http://www.rxoutreach.com).

### Asthma & SCD Action Plan

All students with asthma and sickle cell disease should have a written Action Plan that details personal information about the child's symptoms, medications, any physical activity limitations and provides specific instructions about what to do if an asthma or pain attack does not improve with prescribed medication.

### Visit Your Child's School Nurse and Teachers

All of the student's teachers, coaches, as well as the school nurse and/or office should have a current copy of their Action Plan. Discuss with your child's teachers specific triggers and typical symptoms so that they can be prepared to assist your child should an asthma or pain attack occur during the school day.

### Advocate for Your Child

It is also important to learn if your child's school allows students to carry and independently administer their medications. Some schools require students to carry a note from their doctor. Learn what steps need to be taken to have your child carry and use their inhaler if recommended by their doctor.

*Advice from the American Lung Association: <http://www.lung.org/press-room/press-releases/back-to-school-asthma.html>*

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