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Asthma Deaths on the rise

National health figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics just released shows deaths due to asthma are on the increase.

The alarming news indicates a 26% jump from 318 registered deaths in 2005 to 402 deaths in 2006. With 1 in 6 children and 1 in 9 adults suffering from asthma, the statistics also point to almost double the mortality rate in females than in males. Asthma was also identified as an associated or underlying cause of 1,255 deaths registered in 2006.

Mr John Gummer, Chief Executive Officer of The Asthma Foundation of Western Australia said, "It is most concerning that there has been a rise in deaths, particularly since 50% to 60% are preventable and that the numbers are so high, particularly in females".

Australia's National Health Priority Areas include asthma as one of the top seven diseases and conditions given focused attention because of their significant contribution to the burden of illness and injury to the community.

A study conducted by the Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring based on Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme data found that only 16% of the 352,082 Australian's who filled a prescription for asthma preventer medications for the first time during the period July 2004 to June 2005, went on to use them regularly. Professor Guy Marks, Head of Epidemiology Research at the Woolcock Institute, said "Importantly this study shows that while guidelines recommend regular use of preventer medication, this certainly isn't happening in the community".

Mr Gummer agreed that prescribed medication should be maintained in order to manage an asthma condition. "The key to good asthma management is having a written Asthma Action Plan worked out with your doctor and then following it at all times. The Plan includes the medications to take to keep your asthma under control, how to recognise when your asthma is getting worse, how to manage worsening asthma and what to do in an asthma emergency."

"Everyone with asthma should have a written Asthma Action Plan, which should be regularly reviewed with their doctor", he said.

Tuesday May 6th marks World Asthma Day. The Asthma Foundation of Western Australia is conducting its biannual 'Ask the Expert' information session. The session will take place from 7:30pm-9:00pm at Technology Park in Bentley, and will provide the opportunity for parents and individuals to ask questions about childhood asthma and preventative techniques of two leading doctors, Dr Andrew Wilson, consultant Paediatrician at PMH and Associate Professor Richard Loh, Head of Clinical Immunology and Allergy at PMH. To participate please contact the Foundation on 9289 3600.

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