

Information for patients, parents & carers

Using a spacer device with your child

Children and Young Peoples Services

This leaflet will help you understand a spacer device, the benefits of using one, and how to use a spacer with your child.

What is a spacer?

A spacer is a plastic chamber, which helps to deliver medicine to the lungs. When inhalers & spacers are used together they make the medicine more effective.

An Aerochamber Plus is a small colourful spacer. The orange & yellow ones have a mask. The flap in the mask should move when your child breathes in and out. If it doesn't, reposition the mask to create a seal around their nose & mouth. When using the blue aerochamber with a mouth piece, if your child is breathing in correctly you should **not** hear a musical noise.



A Volumatic is a large clear spacer & comes in two parts; it needs to be put together before use. Children under 3 years will need the mask to be attached onto the mouth piece. Older children using the mouth piece should make the valve click each time they breathe in & out.



Why spacers are important?

Spacers are very important because:

- Regardless of your child's age aerosol inhalers are not effective when used on their own, the spacer makes them **more effective**.
- If your child is prescribed a steroid inhaler (preventer medicine), spacers help to reduce the risk of oral thrush by reducing the number of large droplets that reach the mouth. The risk of oral thrush can be further reduced by cleaning your child's teeth or wiping their face if using the mask after their preventer.

How to look after your spacer

When you first get the spacer, using a soft cloth, bowl of warm water & washing up liquid wash it inside and out (the Aerochamber plus needs to be left in the soapy water for 15 minutes). After cleaning remove the spacer from the soapy water. Rinse the mask / mouth piece in fresh water but do **not** rinse the inside of the spacer. Instead leave it to drip-dry. Washing spacers in this way stops the medicine from sticking to the sides. When the spacer is clean & dry allow your child to play with it.

Aerochamber plus spacers - need to be washed once a week following the guidance above. They should be replaced at least every 2 years if you use them every day.

Volumatic spacers - need to be washed once a month following the guidance above. They should be replaced at least every 6 months if you use them every day.

How do I use a spacer with my child?

1. Shake the inhaler well.
2. Fit the inhaler into the hole at the end of the spacer.
3. **If your child is 3 years old or above** place the mouth piece between your child's teeth & get them to close their lips. For **children under 3 years** place the mask over their face to create a seal around the nose and mouth.
4. Press the inhaler once and allow your child to take five breaths in and out of the spacer if your child is using the mouth piece. If your child is using a mask, count out loud to 10.
5. Remove the spacer from your child's mouth / face.

Repeat steps 1 to 5 for each puff. The doctor, nurse or pharmacist will tell you how many puffs are needed and how often you need to give it. Always check with them if you are not sure and ask them to write it down.



Remember... Only put one puff of medicine into the spacer at a time. If you put in more than one puff, the droplets of spray stick together and coat the sides of the spacer which means your child won't breathe them in.

Top tips for babies

Giving babies their inhalers can be challenging. If you are finding it difficult to use a spacer and mask you can try the following:

- Play with the spacer before you need to use it, so that she/he gets used to the feel of it.
- Be positive and smile. Your baby will know if you are anxious.
- Try to avoid giving inhalers to your baby if they are crying as they won't get very much medicine.
- If your baby is wiggly, cuddle your baby on your knee or cradle them in your arms. You can tuck one of their arms out of the way, with your spare hand you can gently hold their other hand to stop them knocking the mask away.
- If you are using a Volumatic spacer, hold the spacer at a 45° angle to keep the 'clicking' valve within the mouth piece open.
- Count out loud to 10 for each puff so they learn how long they need to tolerate it on their face for.
- At 10 remove the mask from their face, congratulate them & make them feel very clever!
- Inhalers can be given to your baby when they are asleep.

Important contact details

The UCLH Children's Respiratory Nurses can be contacted by calling the trust switchboard on **0845 155 5000** or **020 3456 7890** then **Ext 77705**. Or write to Paediatrics, 6th Floor Central, 250 Euston Road, London NW1 2PG. If you would like more information you can contact Asthma UK on 020 7786 4900 or view their website at www.asthma.org.uk

If you would like a large print, audio or translated version of this document please contact 0845 155 5000 or 020 3456 7890 (ext 77705). We will try our best to meet your needs.

Date of publication, August 2011

Last review date: Aug 2011

Next review date, August 2013

Leaflet code: UCLH/SH/PAED/CYPS/SPACER/1

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