



# Media Outreach Tips

## May is Asthma Awareness Month!

A successful media outreach approach can increase the success of your event. The following tips will help you and capture media attention for your asthma activity, event, or program.

### Tell the asthma story.

One way to gain the media's attention is to provide facts about the dangers of asthma to public health. Asthma affects about 22 million people in America and is one of the leading causes of childhood hospitalization.

#### ▼ Build successful relationships with the media.

- ▶ Establish a list of national and local media, taking note of beat reporters. Beat reporters are assigned to a specific area or topic, such as community health and science.
- ▶ Contact beat reporters and editors to introduce yourself and to establish a point of contact for information.

#### ▼ Start with a good media list.

*A good list is one that is relevant and accurate.* In choosing whom to approach, it is important to consider who is likely to want to tell your asthma story, as well as whom you would like to do it. You may want to include small newspapers and community newsletters, in addition to major newspapers and television and radio stations.

#### ▼ Contact the right person.

At major newspapers and television and radio stations, it is appropriate to contact the assignment editor. Your local library may have a media guide listing names and addresses of people you may want to contact. Be sure to get your contact's e-mail address. Many reporters prefer to get releases by e-mail rather than hard copy.

#### ▼ Write a good pitch letter.

After you have a targeted list of reporters and editors, you will need to write a pitch letter. The pitch letter alerts editors and reporters to your story and why they should cover asthma issues (see page 11 for tips).

#### Sample Media Outlets

- ▶ Local newspapers
- ▶ Health producer at a local news station
- ▶ Radio stations
- ▶ Web staff at a local newspaper or broadcast outlet
- ▶ Parenting magazines
- ▶ Hospital medical newsletters
- ▶ Online bulletin boards for your neighborhood
- ▶ Student newspapers at an elementary, middle, or high school or at a college or university
- ▶ Does your area include Hispanic media? Don't forget to reach out to Spanish-language or other media targeted toward an ethnic or non-English-speaking demographic



#### ▼ Write a press release.

A well written press release can yield more media coverage than any amount of advertising could bring to asthma (see page 14 for a sample press release).

#### ▼ Develop a media kit.

Make it as easy as possible for the media to do their jobs. Provide them with statistical information about asthma from reputable sources and provide simple graphics if you have them. Anything you can do to make it easy for reporters to write a story will help. Put together a media kit with a full range of information about asthma issues, environmental triggers, and the specifics of your asthma event. A media kit can include the following materials:

- ▶ Pitch letter
- ▶ Press release (see page 14)
- ▶ Asthma fact sheet (see page 12)
- ▶ Asthma materials order form (see page 17)
- ▶ Proclamation (see page 13)
- ▶ Calendar of events
- ▶ Your contact information
- ▶ Web site addresses, as appropriate



## Media Outreach Tips *(continued)*

### ▼ Follow up.

You've sent your materials out to the reporters and editors on your list and allowed time for them to look over the information. Now it's time to make follow-up calls. During your follow-up calls, you should:

- ▶ Be prepared. Make notes for your calls and be prepared to take notes during the calls. Plan what you are going to say ahead of time and stick to it. Try to anticipate any questions or objections you might hear and have an answer prepared.
- ▶ Be polite and brief. Editors and reporters are usually on a very tight schedule and they will appreciate it if you get right to the point. Identify yourself, tell them why you are calling, and offer to answer any questions they may have.
- ▶ Ask for coverage. After you have confirmed receipt of your letter and answered any questions, ask for coverage of your event.

- ▶ Provide all the information journalists need to cover the story. Make sure your pitch covers the "Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How" of the story. Include your contact information, list possible sources, and include any relevant background material. If you have written a press release, paste that into the e-mail.
- ▶ If you are pitching a broadcast outlet, remember that they are interested in gathering video footage. Tell them about possible photo-ops or events.

### ▼ News Pegs

Journalists often look for "news pegs," which make a discussion of a broad issue relevant to the moment and "newsworthy." When trying to obtain coverage of asthma issues, look for news pegs and point them out to the media when you speak to them. News pegs can be breaking news, or a simple event that brings a story into focus or makes it more timely. Below are some possible asthma-related news pegs that can help frame other media pitches and guide your discussions with reporters.

- ▶ May is Asthma Awareness Month! This "month" is a great reason to promote asthma awareness. World Asthma Day, organized by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, and the World Health Organization, also falls during this time.
- ▶ Discuss the impacts of asthma on your community by sharing hospitalizations and emergency visit statistics and prevention methods through reducing environmental triggers.
- ▶ Any speech, rally, event, or meeting can be an opportunity to involve the press.

## Telling Your Asthma Story

### ▼ How to Pitch a Story

Pitching a news story to a reporter, editor, or producer can seem intimidating, but it is not difficult if you prepare yourself adequately. The most effective way to contact the media with a story idea is through a "pitch letter," which provides the reporter or media with all the information they need to pursue the story.

### ▼ Use the following tips to write a good pitch letter:

- ▶ E-mail is often the best way to get your letter in front of the right person. Plan to follow up your e-mail with a timely phone call.
- ▶ Keep it short. Journalists don't have much time to spend each day reading pitches. Begin your pitch with your most compelling information to grab the reader's interest, and explain the story in just a few paragraphs. If you have a news peg (see next section), make it clear at the beginning of the letter.

