Asthma is on the rise and the rate of people suffering from the respiratory condition has increased by one per cent a year since the last official study in 2008, according to the Malta Asthmatic Society. The prevalence of the disease on a national scale increased from 7.3 per cent in 2002 to nine per cent in 2008. The society estimates that the figure represented 13 per cent of the population – that is, 52,000 people.

Today, about 8,000 children suffer from asthma and about 1,000 are admitted into hospital each year because of it, the Health Ministry told The Times.

During a conference to mark World Asthma Day last week, health promotion director Charmaine Gauci said today’s indoor lifestyle was believed to be increasing the rate of asthma in children.

Consultant respiratory physician Stephen Montefort agreed adding that the way people furnished their houses – with fitted carpets, heating and lack of ventilation – did not help. He added Maltese doctors were studying the effect of indoor pollution, at home and school, on respiratory childhood health.

He pointed out that the 2002 International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood study showed that wheezing among five to eight-year-olds had increased by more than 50 per cent since 1995 and trebled since a 1985 local study on wheezing.

Maltese doctors will carry out a follow-up study in October, he said. Asked about geographical patterns of asthma, Prof. Montefort said the ISAAC studies showed wheezing, commonly a symptom of asthma, increased across localities. However, certain areas stood out. In the Central East and East, such as Paola and Gudja, the rate of wheezing children in the age group studied increased from just under 10 per cent to more than 20 per cent between 1995 and 2002.

In the Grand Harbour area that includes Floriana, it increased from nine per cent to 20 per cent while in the Central North, like Pembroke and Sliema, the figure rose from about six per cent to 16 per cent.

The Health Ministry said that according to results of the 2008 European Health Interview Survey, there were no statistically significant increases in asthma by locality since 2002. Prof. Montefort stressed the importance of taking preventative treatment and not relying solely on relievers.

This also applied to pregnant women who often feared treatment might harm their baby, which was not the case. He said Malta had a low asthma mortality rate, mainly since distances are short and people manage to get help in time.

Over the past 17 years some 126 people died of asthma and most were over 40 years old. There were no deaths under the age of 14.

So what is being done to curb this increasing health problem?

The ministry spokesman said the government put in place several laws and regulations to control dust and second-hand smoke – the two main triggers. In 2010 it developed a strategy for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, including asthma. A draft legal notice proposed setting up a committee to tackle air quality issues that are not covered by other laws such as fireplaces and industrial events.
What are the tell-tale symptoms?

- A cough with no phlegm
- Shortness of breath that gets worse with exercise
- Wheezing bouts
- Coughing when exposed to cold air
- Tightness of skin between the ribs when breathing
- Persistent coughing at night or in the early morning
- Difficulty breathing out - taking twice as long as breathing in
- Rapid pulse and sweating

Benefits of the green:

**Oliver Attard**
Managing Director

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the respiratory system, which has become increasingly common throughout the developed world during the past few decades. Its prevalence has been attributed to a number of factors, including pollution, changes in diet, and lifestyle choices. However, the exact causes of asthma remain uncertain.

Recent research has shown that the intake of marine oils, which contain high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, may have a positive impact on asthma symptoms. A study published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology found that children who consumed marine oils had fewer asthma attacks and required less medication than those who did not.

One of the main measures used in the trial was a product called Lyprinol. The extracted chains of fatty acids have been found to reduce the frequency and severity of childhood asthma attacks. It did.

What the researchers found was that 85.2 percent of the children reported that they had "none or hardly any problems" with asthma during the study period. This was measured by an international standard known as the Juniper Scale, which involves set questions and a scale of one to seven. What the researchers found was that 85.2 percent of the children reported that they had "none or hardly any problems" with asthma during the study period. The children were given four capsules per day of fatty acids unique to the New Zealand green-lipped mussel. The extracted chains of fatty acids have been given the name PCSO-524 and are exclusive to a product called Lyprinol. PCSI-524 is the result of a process developed by Australian and Japanese scientists, which found a way to extract the fragile fatty acids.
It is important to get children running out in the open air and doing exercise, said Ms Merceza Galziele, who feels in her heart that she would not have done anything to harm their health.

I was growing up we were taught that if you had asthma, you were somehow less capable. So I want our children to be able to do sports.

The gil and the medical profession now recommends exercise to open the lungs. Parents should ensure their children get to go and do sports.

You can play football as much as he did and Beppe does gymnastics.

The New Zealand trial was designed by Dr Allen Laiing, a paediatric allergy specialist. The work was carried out by general practitioner Dr Jim Lello; scientist Elizabeth Robinson of the Department of Community Health at the University of Auckland; and nurses Debra Leutenegger and Ann Wheat of Asthma Health at the University of Auckland; and nurses Robinson of the Department of Community Health.

The study authors wrote: "Lyprinol significantly improved the percentage of children reporting little or no trouble with their asthma at three months of treatment."

"We conclude that Lyprinol is a safe nutritional supplement for children with moderate asthma and that larger prospective controlled studies should explore its potential use as a neartreatment in asthma as an addition to conventional treatment."

The New Zealand trial supported earlier work by respiratory specialists in London and St Petersberg, who reported a 50 per cent decrease in the frequency and severity of childhood asthma among subjects who were given daily doses of PCSO-524.

Extensive research on the link between omega-3 in the diet and the frequency and severity of asthma has been published in medical journals.

One of the most referenced studies was of the comparative rates of asthma among Inuit in Greenland and Denmark. The Inuit study, which was published in the Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, examined 4,162 Inuit, about half of whom lived in Denmark and had a typical westernised diet. The other half still lived in Greenland. Some lived traditional lifestyles in remote fishing villages and others lived in urban settings.

What the study found was that the rate of asthma among the Inuit who still lived in villages and ate mostly fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids was 72.2 per cent less than among the Inuit who had moved to Denmark and adopted a modern westernised diet low in omega-3 fatty acids.

Current medical treatment for asthma involves the use of inhaled steroids, which have been reported to cause growth retardation in children, weight gain and the eye disease glaucoma.

On 12 June 2009, the United States Government’s Food and Drug Administration mandated a warning on the latest generation of asthma drugs, known as leukotriene inhibitors, which stated that they caused agitation, aggression, anxiety, dream abnormalities, hallucinations, depression, insomnia, irritability, restlessness and thoughts of suicide.

REFERENCES
Parents must act to ease child symptoms

**UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES**

Parents can help avoid asthma attacks in their children by identifying triggers and taking some simple steps to avoid them. Reducing contact with airborne triggers may delay or prevent asthma symptoms.

There is a scientifically recognised link between asthma and smoking. So it is crucial not to expose children to tobacco smoke before or after birth.

Smoking during pregnancy increases the chance of the child developing wheezing, asthma and other respiratory illnesses. The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate organises various initiatives to raise awareness on the harmful effects of tobacco, in efforts to encourage smokers to quit and others not to take up smoking.

We also offer one-to-one counseling, aquitine for advice and smoking cessation classes. So help is there.

One of the identified asthma triggers is dust mites, body parts and droppings. Dust mites are tiny bugs that live everywhere around us. To control them, use covers on mattresses and pillows, wash bed linen in hot water weekly and get rid of feather pillows and comforters.

Eliminate rugs and carpeting whenever possible. Curtains should be washed often and airing boxes will help too.

Pollens are an airborne trigger that is commonly encountered during the spring, summer and early autumn times of the year. One way to try to avoid it is by staying indoors during the peak pollen periods.

Pollens counts tend to be highest during the afternoons or evenings. It is advised to keep windows closed and use the air-conditioning on, rather than having windows open.

With this conflicting evidence, try to minimise the risk by at least keeping the pet out of the bedroom of the person with asthma. Pets should be bathed frequently and kept away from the bedroom of the person with asthma.

If hot, humid weather triggers symptoms, make sure you keep your child in an air-conditioned environment.

Vehicles’ air conditioner is advised to keep windows closed and use the air-conditioning on, rather than having windows open.

There are some other irritants that can also lead to airway inflammations and flare-ups.

These include: perfumes, aerosol sprays, cleaning products, paint or gas fumes and air pollution.

The best advice for parents is to learn what triggers your child’s attacks so that you can avoid them whenever possible.

What better investment can we make in the health of our population and wealth of our country? For effective control, it is essential to make medications affordable and available, especially for low-income families.

Asthma is a chronic disease characterised by recurrent attacks of breathlessness and wheeze, which vary in severity and frequency from person to person.

Symptoms may occur several times in a day or week in affected individuals. Asthma occurs in all countries, regardless of development level. More than 80% of asthma deaths occur in low and lower-middle income countries. For effective control, it is essential to make medications affordable and available, especially for low-income families.

Symptoms become worse during physical activity or at night. Failure to recognise and avoid triggers that lead to a tightening airway can be life-threatening and may result in an asthma attack, respiratory distress and even death.

With appropriate treatment, such as using inhaled corticosteroids to ease bronchial inflammation, the number of asthma-related deaths can be reduced.

Asthma is often under-diagnosed and under-treated, creating a substantial burden to individuals and families and possibly re-stricting individuals’ activities for a lifetime.

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**COMMON ASTHMA TRIGGERS WORLDWIDE**

- **90%** Experience symptoms with the exertion from exercise
- **60%** Experience symptoms from second-hand smoke
- **55%** Experience symptoms from climate conditions: cold, wet, dry, sudden changes.
- **37%** Experience symptoms from pet dander, a combination of dead skin cells and hair
- **30%** Experience symptoms from pollen, an airborne allergen that sets off numerous asthma symptoms

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**Lyprinol®**

*Move without pain*

For the dietary treatment of arthritic joint inflammation

- 300 times more potent than salmon oil
- 350 times more potent than evening primrose oil
- 400 times more potent than flax oil

"Studies have indicated that Lyprinol may be beneficial as a supplement for asthma sufferers, with the advantage of no adverse side effects"