

Best Practice Message

June 2023

Assessing Asthma Control

Practice changing moments

- Māori patients are disproportionately affected by asthma hospitalisations.
- The Asthma Control Test is validated for assessing a patient's asthma control and can be used to adjust therapy.
- Previous exacerbations are a strong indicator of future exacerbation risk.

Introduction

Asthma affects a large proportion of our population. Hawke's Bay has a greater rate of asthma hospitalisations for asthma than the New Zealand average. Māori patients are also disproportionately affected with a hospitalisation rate of more than double the rate in non-Māori adults¹. We have previously covered [management of adult patients with asthma with AIR therapy](#) which is now the preferred therapy for adults compared to single reliever therapy.

A cornerstone of care of patients with asthma is continual assessment of asthma control and adjusting management appropriately.

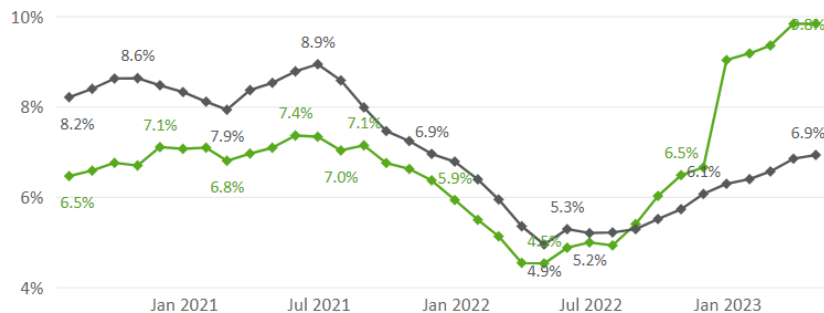


Figure 1. percentage of patients (18+) with an ACT score recorded in the past 12 months for Māori (green) and non-Māori (grey). Practice specific data including patient lists is available via Thalamus.

Using ACT to assess a patient's management – putting the patient in control

The Asthma Control Test (ACT) has been validated to assess the level of a patient's asthma control. ACT scores are linked to future use of rescue medications, exacerbations and asthma related quality of life². A score of >19/25 reflects well controlled asthma². A change of 3 points from baseline indicates a clinical improvement or worsening of the patient's control³, this directs patient management to step up or down as needed. It is however important to assess the patient's adherence and inhaler technique prior to considering adjustments of therapy.

The ACT is a metric of the patient's control over the previous 4 weeks. It can be helpful for patients to repeat the test on a monthly basis to help the patient to identify trends in their asthma control over time and seasonally⁴. While patients with asthma often have a reduced sensitivity to recognition of airways resistance, patients' self-reported ACT scores are similar to when conducted with their medical professional⁴.

The New Zealand Asthma Foundation has created an [app](#) which can be used to take the asthma control test as well as create an asthma action plan which the patient can then easily share with whānau and their healthcare professionals.

Previous exacerbations predict future exacerbations

Extra care is required to assess asthma therapy and adherence with their asthma management plan in patients who have experienced an exacerbation. While chronic undermedication, poor lung function, comorbidities, poor symptom control and asthma severity are all linked with exacerbation risk, recent severe exacerbations carry the greatest risk of future severe exacerbations⁵. The odds of future exacerbations of asthma is almost seven times higher in a patient who has had a severe exacerbation in the past year⁶.

Managing trigger factors, co-morbid conditions and monitoring of symptoms and lung function are essential when reviewing a patient following an exacerbation.

Resources:

- [Asthma Foundation Asthma App](#)
- [He Ako Hiringa EPiC dashboard](#)
- [Asthma control test](#)
- [NZ Asthma guideline quick reference guide](#)
- [Thalamus dashboard](#)

References:

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Authored by: Ben Firestone

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