

January 30, 2021

For patients with asthma ≥ 12 years of age, low dose budesonide/formoterol (*Symbicort*) is now the preferred reliever medication

Dear providers,

If you currently prescribe inhaled albuterol for patients with asthma, please note that **low dose inhaled corticosteroid (ICS)/formoterol** (e.g., *budesonide/formoterol* or *Symbicort*) **is now the preferred reliever medication for patients ≥ 12 years of age for all categories of asthma severity.**

- **Guideline recommendations:** This based on recent guidelines from the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA). For a summary of the GINA guidelines, visit <https://tinyurl.com/y5aqvnod>.¹
- **Data:** As-needed low dose ICS-formoterol reduced the risk of severe exacerbations by about two-thirds compared to short-acting $\beta 2$ agonist (SABA)-only treatment in adults and adolescents with mild asthma. This was the case in patients both with and without concurrent maintenance controller therapy.²
- **HPSM coverage of ICS/formoterol products:**
 - MEDI-CAL, CCS, HEALTHWORX: generic budesonide/formoterol
 - CAREADVANTAGE CAL MEDICONNECT: brand Symbicort

Please Note: SABA (e.g., *albuterol*) is still the recommended rescue inhaler for 1) children between the ages of 6 to 11 years of age and 2) patients taking combination ICS-LABA medications with a different LABA (e.g., *Advair*).

If you have any questions about this letter or the patient information provided, please do not hesitate to contact the HPSM Pharmacy Department at **650-616-2088**.

Thank you,

The Health Plan of San Mateo

1. Global Initiative for Asthma. 2020 GINA report global strategy for asthma management and prevention. https://ginasthma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GINA-2020-full-report_-final_-wms.pdf (Accessed June 1, 2020).

2. O'Byrne PM, FitzGerald JM, Bateman ED, Barnes PJ, Zhong N, Keen C, Jorup C, et al. Inhaled budesonide-formoterol as needed in mild asthma. *N Engl J Med* 2018;378:1865-76.

GINA 2020 Guidelines **NEW!** (Preferred Rescue Inhaler for Asthmatic Patients ≥12 Years of Age)

NO LONGER PREFERRED: SABA

For safety, GINA no longer recommends SABA-only treatment (e.g., albuterol or levalbuterol) for Step 1 or as the preferred reliever medication.¹

PREFERRED: ICS-FORMOTEROL

Direct evidence from two large studies, one showing a 64% reduction in severe exacerbations vs SABA-only treatment, support the use of budesonide-formoterol for rescue.²

► **HPSM COVERAGE:** Budesonide-formoterol is on the Medi-Cal and Healthworx formularies. Brand Symbicort inhaler is on the CareAdvantage formulary.

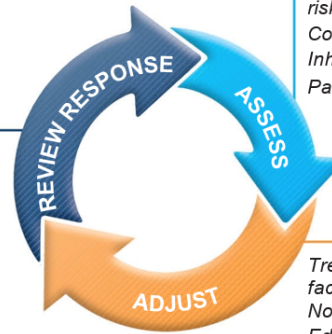
Adults & adolescents 12+ years

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Personalized asthma management:

Assess, Adjust, Review response

Symptoms
Exacerbations
Side-effects
Lung function
Patient satisfaction



Confirmation of diagnosis if necessary
Symptom control & modifiable risk factors (including lung function)
Comorbidities
Inhaler technique & adherence
Patient goals

Treatment of modifiable risk factors & comorbidities
Non-pharmacological strategies
Education & skills training
Asthma medications

Asthma medication options:

Adjust treatment up and down for individual patient needs

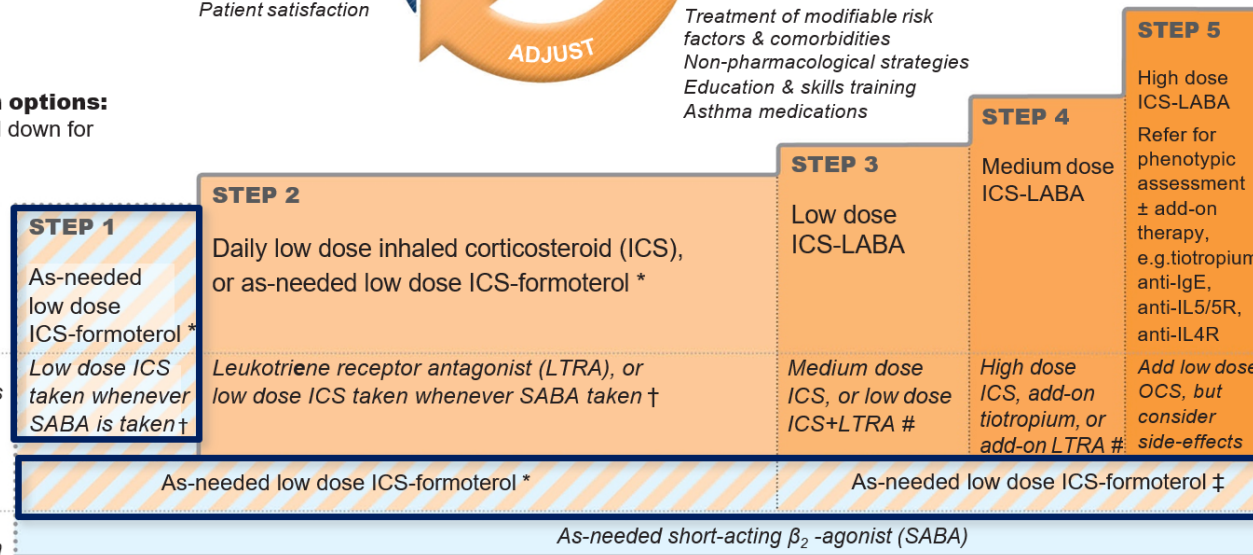
PREFERRED CONTROLLER

to prevent exacerbations and control symptoms

Other controller options

PREFERRED RELIEVER

Other reliever option



* Off-label; data only with budesonide-formoterol (bud-form)

† Off-label; separate or combination ICS and SABA inhalers

‡ Low-dose ICS-form is the reliever for patients prescribed bud-form or BDP-form maintenance and reliever therapy

Consider adding HDM SLIT for sensitized patients with allergic rhinitis and FEV₁ >70% predicted

1. Global Initiative for Asthma. 2020 GINA report global strategy for asthma management and prevention. https://ginasthma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GINA-2020-full-report_-final_-wms.pdf (Accessed June 1, 2020).

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