

Your Asthma Game Plan: 'A Team Effort'

BY GARY FITZGERALD

Chris Draft stood ready, on the field at Cincinnati's pro football stadium, eager for the next snap. The veteran linebacker, playing for the St. Louis Rams in an August 2009 preseason game, was beginning his 12th season in the NFL.

All of a sudden, smoke from a fluke car fire in the parking lot blew inside the stadium. Draft felt shortness of breath – a sign of an oncoming asthma attack.

Knowing smoke is one of his triggers, he immediately headed to the sideline and sought help – and his inhaler – from the Rams' athletic trainers.

Draft, first diagnosed with asthma in the mid-1990s, had shared his asthma action plan with trainers before preseason. He knew exactly what to do when symptoms flared up.

"A big part of managing asthma is having a plan and then sharing it with the people around you," Draft says. "It's a team effort."

Draft, who retired from the NFL in 2010 after 12 seasons, is one of the nation's leading asthma advocates. Through his Chris Draft Family Foundation, he has partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency and AANMA to make sure kids with asthma kick off the school year right with an asthma action plan and inhalers in hand.

Draft tells students that not having an asthma action plan is akin to playing an NFL game without a game plan.

"Or it's like going into an NFL game without an inhaler on the sidelines and

the trainer not knowing you have asthma," Draft adds. "If you have asthma, it's something that is a part of you. You have to manage it. That starts with putting together a plan after being very honest about where you stand with your asthma."

"This is not something you keep to yourself. Review the plan with your parents. Give it to your school nurse. Show it to your teachers, especially your physical

education teachers.

"Let your friends know, too, and be honest about it. If they see that you're not breathing well, they can help you."

Draft, 36, says he carries his inhaler with him wherever he goes. He encourages children and teen-agers to make carrying it a part of their daily routine.

"It's something you do as you leave home every morning – grab your wallet or purse, put on your backpack, and grab your inhaler," he says. "Then you're ready to go."

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Join Chris's team! Share your story at www.asthmateam.org on how you or someone you know is tackling asthma. Check out Chris's EPA Public Service Announcement "Asthma Can Be Tackled."

