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May 1: Today is the 20th annual World Asthma Day, an event held each May to raise awareness of Asthma worldwide. World Asthma Day is organized by the Global Initiative for Asthma, or GINA (www.ginasthma.org), a World Health Organization collaborative and 501(c)3 organization founded in 1993.

According to WHO estimates, 235 million people suffer from asthma, which can cause wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing. Although asthma cannot be cured, it is possible to control asthma to reduce and prevent asthma attacks, also called episodes.¹ In the United States, approximately half of people with asthma had at least one asthma attack in 2012. More children (55%) than adults (49%) had an attack.

Asthma is the most common chronic disease among children. Asthma is not just a public health problem for high income countries: it occurs in all countries regardless of level of development. Over 80% of asthma deaths occurs in low and lower-middle income countries. Asthma is under-diagnosed and under-treated, creating a substantial burden to individuals and families and possibly restricting individuals' activities for a lifetime.

Asthma attacks cause adults to miss work and children to miss school. These dangerous and sometimes life-threatening episodes reduce the quality of life for people with asthma. The good news is that we can raise awareness about asthma and how it can be controlled. People with asthma can prevent asthma attacks if they learn how to avoid asthma triggers like tobacco smoke, mold, outdoor air pollution, and colds and flu. Asthma episodes can also be prevented by using inhaled corticosteroids and other prescribed daily long-term control medicines correctly.

This year's World Asthma Day theme is "NEVER TOO EARLY, NEVER TOO LATE. It's always the right time to address airways disease." The theme provides a call to action for both patients and healthcare providers worldwide to evaluate symptoms regardless of the timepoint in one's life they may occur and take actions to ensure that the asthma is controlled.

World Asthma Day was first held in 1998, and has grown each year to become one of the most important Asthma events globally. On World Asthma Day, hundreds of awareness-raising activities will take place in countries all over the world. Further information about GINA and World Asthma Day can be found at GINA's website: www.ginasthma.org. Documents detailing GINA's global strategy for diagnosis, management, and prevention of COPD are also available at www.ginasthma.org.

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References:

1. *World Health Report*. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available from URL: <http://www.who.int/respiratory/asthma/en/>, 2018.