

FIGURE 20. CLASSIFYING SEVERITY OF ASTHMA EXACERBATIONS IN THE URGENT OR EMERGENCY CARE SETTING

Note: Patients are instructed to use quick-relief medications if symptoms occur or if PEF drops below 80 percent predicted or personal best. If PEF is 50–79 percent, the patient should monitor response to quick-relief medication carefully and consider contacting a clinician. If PEF is below 50 percent, immediate medical care is usually required. In the urgent or emergency care setting, the following parameters describe the severity and likely clinical course of an exacerbation.

	Symptoms and Signs	Initial PEF (or FEV ₁)	Clinical Course
Mild	Dyspnea only with activity (assess tachypnea in young children)	PEF \geq 70 percent predicted or personal best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Usually cared for at home ■ Prompt relief with inhaled SABA ■ Possible short course of oral systemic corticosteroids
Moderate	Dyspnea interferes with or limits usual activity	PEF 40–69 percent predicted or personal best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Usually requires office or ED visit ■ Relief from frequent inhaled SABA ■ Oral systemic corticosteroids; some symptoms last for 1–2 days after treatment is begun
Severe	Dyspnea at rest; interferes with conversation	PEF $<$ 40 percent predicted or personal best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Usually requires ED visit and likely hospitalization ■ Partial relief from frequent inhaled SABA ■ Oral systemic corticosteroids; some symptoms last for $>$3 days after treatment is begun ■ Adjunctive therapies are helpful
Subset: Life threatening	Too dyspneic to speak; perspiring	PEF $<$ 25 percent predicted or personal best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Requires ED/hospitalization; possible ICU ■ Minimal or no relief from frequent inhaled SABA ■ Intravenous corticosteroids ■ Adjunctive therapies are helpful

Key: ED, emergency department; FEV₁, forced expiratory volume in 1 second; ICU, intensive care unit; PEF, peak expiratory flow; SABA, short-acting beta₂-agonist