

Snorkel opens underwater world for asthmatics

A snorkel built to carry an inhaler could open up a whole new undersea world for asthmatics.

The Australian-developed MediDive Asthma Freedom Snorkel houses the puffer canister within a silicon chamber attached to the mask, giving asthma sufferers easy access to medication at the press of a button.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show around 10 per cent of the population are affected by asthma.

Executive director of the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators, Col McKenzie, said the mask could enable many of them to explore coral reefs and other natural wonders without fear of an asthma attack.

"A lot of those people would not be able to undertake recreational snorkelling or diving and this is the first step down the path to allow those people to do those sorts of activities," Mr McKenzie said. "Part of the problem is that for people who suffer from asthma, exertion triggers it or a little bit of seawater mist or saline solution can trigger it, and those people probably couldn't even go swimming.

"But in using this, when they start to have asthma attacks, they can hit themselves with the Ventolin (medication) straight away."

Mr McKenzie said some tour operators on the Great Barrier Reef had been carrying the snorkels during trials over the past month and the feedback had been positive.

There also were plans for the invention to be modified for use in scuba diving, he said.

"But, even more interestingly could be the defence application because potentially you could incorporate that within a rebreather, which is used in assault diving and recovers exhaled oxygen for re-use."

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