

Hosted by 

The nose knows: Allergy season here with vengeance

(AP) – 9 hours ago

There may be a dusting of truth to allergy sufferers' complaints that this season is, well, a bigger headache than years past.

Heavy snow and rain in some parts of the country have nourished a profusion of tree pollen, while a sudden shift to warm, sunny weather has made its release more robust. Add in the wind, and the suffering skyrockets.

Warnings for a difficult season have come from allergy specialists from New York to Atlanta, Chicago to California.

"This past week has been one of the worst ever," rasped Lynne Ritchie, 70, as she bought allergy medicine this week at a Manhattan drugstore.

Dr. Stanley Schwartz hears that from patients all the time — every year, in fact, he noted with a wry smile.

"Literally, every year is the worst year," said Schwartz, chief of allergy and rheumatology for Kaleida Health and the University at Buffalo. "Now it may actually be, but when it's there and you're feeling it, you don't remember what last year was like."

April was a historic month for weather, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and West Virginia all set records for the wettest April since 1895.

Pollen counts and allergy attacks vary widely from region to region, locality to locality and day to day, and no one entity tracks the full complexity of their ups and downs across the country. This year, though, signs really do point to a particularly prickly season.

Dr. Joseph Leija, the allergist who performs the Gottlieb Allergy Count for the Midwest, said last month that tree pollen was unseasonably high in Chicago and predicted "one of the worst allergy seasons ever."

At Holy Name Medical Center in Hackensack, N.J., allergy director Dr. Theodore Falk told The Record newspaper that tree pollen "just exploded" last week because of a cool spring.

In Los Angeles, rain, a heat wave and the Santa Ana winds created an "allergy storm," Dr. Jacob Offenberger said in the Los Angeles Daily News in February. Around the same time, unseasonable warmth had Dr. Kevin Schaffer of the Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic describing this year's pollen levels as "off the charts."

A sampling from the National Allergy Bureau's tracking website showed high pollen counts in several cities this week, including Albany and New York City, with their birch, oak and maple trees, and Oxford, Ala., where walnut, pine and willows are in bloom. The bureau is part of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.

"It's been a very bad season so far. ... A lot of people suffering," said Dr. William Reisacher, director of the allergy center at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City.

"A lot of people who haven't suffered in previous years have come in for the first time in several years with symptoms," he said, noting that the Northeast's sudden change from cold, snowy winter to warm spring has worsened the situation.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America lists Knoxville, Tenn.; Louisville, Ky.; Charlotte, N.C.; Jackson, Miss.; and Chattanooga, Tenn.; as its "2011 spring allergy capitals."

The annual ranking is based on pollen scores measuring airborne grass, tree and weed pollen, and mold spores, along with the number of allergy medications used per patient and the number of allergy specialists per patient.

Four of those five cities are in states — Tennessee, Mississippi and Kentucky — that all had drenching springs and significant flooding, although a number of factors can figure into the degree of suffering.

Medications used in the past may not be as effective if symptoms are worse this year, Reisacher said. Many of his patients in New York have required multiple drugs, including nasal sprays, oral antihistamines and eye drops.

Madison Sasser, a 21-year-old senior at Belmont University in Nashville, left her doctor's office with two kinds of nose spray and eye drops Thursday after already enduring an allergy-related sinus infection three weeks ago — right before final exams.

"It's been awful," she said. "My eyes have been so itchy and red, and I sneeze and cough. It's just been terrible."

While water that encourages tree growth and mold might be chiefly to blame in the South, in Dallas it's the wind that's helping to scatter the allergens.

"We've had heavy winds and the tree pollens were in heavy bloom, and all the wind was causing a lot of people a lot of problems," said Jill Weinger, physician's assistant at the Dallas Allergy & Asthma Center, where some patients were returning for treatment after years of absence.

Despite anecdotal evidence, it's difficult to determine whether this year is really worse than previous years, said Angel Waldron, spokeswoman for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation, which plans to tabulate pollen counts for cities later in the season.

But in general, she said, allergy seasons have been getting longer and more challenging.

"We do know that climate change and warmer temperatures are allowing trees to pollinate longer than usual," she said. "Although people feel things are worse than ever before, it's actually because of the longer season. It's a longer time to endure."

In Louisville, Ky., 20-year-old Jared Casey's glazed eyes scanned the aisles of a Walgreens drugstore Thursday afternoon. He greeted the allergy season with an over-the-counter purchase of Claritin-D at the beginning of February — six weeks earlier than last year.

He switched to Zyrtec at the beginning of May, when his ears began plugging up, and said his symptoms are lasting longer than in years past.

"It's been a lot worse," he said. "My ears have stayed plugged up for two weeks."

Though medication can help, there are other ways to lessen the misery.

Reisacher tells patients to shower and change clothes after coming inside and not to toss clothes worn outside onto the bed. Tree pollen is sticky and tends to linger on fabric, skin and hair.

He also advises shutting bedroom windows before bedtime to prevent pollen from invading in the early morning. Pollen counts are highest between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.

Kristen Fennimore of New Egypt, N.J., counts herself among the than 35 million Americans plagued by seasonal allergic rhinitis — also known as hay fever, a condition characterized by sneezing, stuffiness, a runny nose and the telltale itchiness in the nose, roof of the mouth, throat, eyes or ears.

Until recently, the 28-year-old legal assistant said, she was feeling pretty good and thought she might get off easy this year. But pride goes before a fall.

"I was going around bragging how my allergies weren't bad this year," she said. "Then this week, it's been horrible."

Thompson reported from Buffalo, N.Y. Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers Verena Dobnik in New York City, Josh Lederman in Trenton, N.J., Pinky Mehta in Louisville and Joe Edwards in Nashville.

On the Net:

- Pollen counts by region: <http://tinyurl.com/>



Photo



In this p
2011, a
N.Y. All
the cour
or has b
Photo/D



Copyright © 2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Related articles

The nose knows: Allergy season here
with vengeance
The Associated Press - 9 hours ago

The Nose Knows: Allergy Season Here
with Vengeance
KMOX.com - 3 hours ago

Allergy Season Here With Vengeance
WSOC Charlotte - 4 hours ago

[More coverage \(1\) »](#)



Add News to your Google Homepage

©2011 Google - [About Google News](#) - [Blog](#) - [Help Center](#) - [Help for Publishers](#) - [Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Policy](#) - [Google Home](#)