



Lewis County Public Health & Social Services

Health Beat

For release in March 2020

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Springtime Allergy Management Tips

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Feel a sneeze coming on? You're not alone this time of year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 19 million adults and 5.2 million children suffer from hay fever – just one of the seasonal allergies each spring.

Allergies occur when your body's immune system overreacts to some substance. Seasonal allergies are a reaction to something in the environment that sends your immune system into overdrive, usually in the spring or fall.

Symptoms can range from a mildly annoying, to thoroughly miserable, to life-threatening in the event of a severe asthma attack. What you are feeling is your body's reaction to something it thinks is dangerous.

Common Pollens in This Area

Tree pollens are usually the first springtime allergens to appear each year. By the end of February this year, cedar and juniper pollen were already at very high levels. Hazelnut, alder, elm, birch, cottonwood, maple, ash, oak, and poplar round out the local tree pollen producers.

Weed and grass pollens had not yet registered, generally starting to appear in early April and continuing into the fall. Peak season is mid-May to Mid-July. Rainy springs can increase mold growth, which also leads to allergic reactions among many.

According to the CDC, climate change, resulting in more frost-free days and warmer seasonal air temperatures, can contribute to shifts in flowering time and pollen release. Increased carbon dioxide in the air can cause plants to produce more allergens. Higher pollen concentrations and longer pollen seasons can increase allergic reactions among sensitive persons.

Simultaneous exposure to toxic air pollutants can worsen allergic responses. Extreme rainfall and rising temperatures can reduce indoor air quality by increasing indoor fungi and mold growth. This increases respiratory and asthma-related conditions. The CDC predicts that as pollen exposures increase, allergy sufferers will face increased challenges in maintaining adequate asthma control.

Allergy Management Tips

Here are several strategies to reduce your exposure to allergens and make your allergy season less miserable.

- In general, avoid outdoor activity in the early mornings when pollen counts are the highest.
- Stay indoors on dry, windy days when the pollen is sailing through the air. Wait until a good rain clears the pollen from the air.
- Delegate lawn mowing and other gardening chores. Wear a mask that filters pollens if you have to be outdoors.
- Don't wear clothes in the house that you have worn outside. Don't hang laundry outside as it will trap pollen as it dries.
- Keep doors and windows closed in your home. Don't drive with windows rolled down. Use air conditioning if available with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
- Shower after being outside to rinse pollen off your skin.
- Rinse your nose twice a day with nasal saline and blow it afterwards. Just as showering gets the pollen off your skin, rinsing your nasal mucosa with saline may help.

- Use weather apps, local news, and television weather reports to help you avoid going outside when pollen counts are high. If high counts are forecasted, pre-medicate with your allergy medicines before your symptoms start.

If you have seasonal allergies and feel like you're more sick than usual, it's time to see your doctor. There may be more effective medications that will provide better symptom relief. Or, you may actually be sick, which is adding more misery to your usual allergy symptoms. Either way, it is an easy precaution that is worth taking for your health.

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