

# April's Topic: Seasonal Allergies

By: Camille Quiles, Pharm.D.



## Spring is in the Air, along with Seasonal Allergies!

### HEALTHCARE CLINIC HOURS:

Monday-Wednesday, Friday

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Thursday

9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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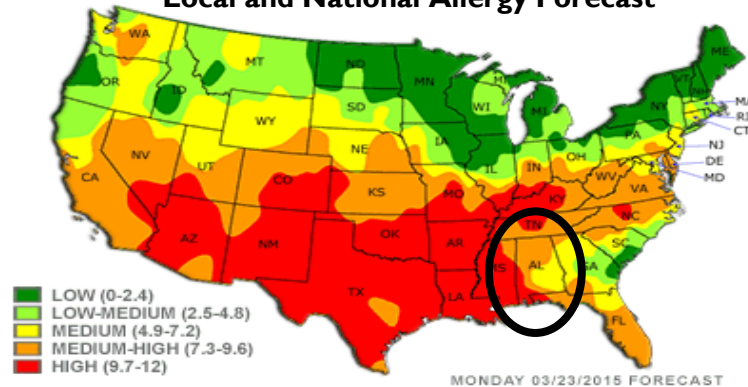
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Spring has finally arrived bringing with it a multitude of seasonal allergies. Experts predict that the 2015 allergy season could be more severe in comparison to previous years.

In many areas of the U.S., spring allergies begin in February and last until early summer. Mild winter temperatures can cause plants to pollinate early, and a wet, rainy spring can lead to rapid plant growth. This can lead to an increase in mold, causing symptoms to last into the fall.<sup>1</sup>

So if you are sneezing and coughing, or your nose and/or eyes are runny and itchy during certain times of the year, you may be suffering from seasonal allergies.

### Local and National Allergy Forecast



Source:  
<http://www.pollen.com/allergy-weather-forecast.asp>

## What is an Allergy?

Allergies are an overreaction of the body's immune system to substances that generally do not affect other individuals. These substances, called **allergens**, can cause sneezing, coughing, itching of the eyes and/or nose, watery eyes, runny nose, and nasal congestion. Allergic reactions can range from simply bothersome to life-threatening. Allergies are commonly associated with chronic conditions like sinusitis and asthma.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of different allergens out there. Common allergens include pollen, dust mites, pet dander, peanuts, and seafood. Medications, latex, metals (eg. nickel), chemicals found in household cleaning products, and perfumes and dyes found in beauty products can lead to a reaction in some people.<sup>3</sup>

## What causes Spring allergies?

### **POLLEN**

- These tiny grains released into the air by trees, grasses, and weeds can travel for miles, spreading a path of misery for allergy sufferers.

### What is a pollen count?

- The **pollen count** measures the amount of allergens in the air. The higher the pollen count, the greater the misery.
- You can find out the daily pollen count in your area by watching your local weather forecast or by going to this website: <https://www.aaaai.org/global/nab-pollen-counts.aspx>

### What are some of the biggest spring allergy offenders in Alabama?

- Trees:
  - Ash, Beech, Boxelder, Cedar, Cottonwood, Cypress, Elm, Hickory, Maple, Mulberry, Oak, Pine, Sycamore, & Willow.
- Grasses & Weeds:
  - Johnson, Orchard, & Perennial rye.

## What happens in our body when we are exposed to an allergen<sup>3</sup>?

A person is exposed to an allergen by inhaling it, swallowing it, or getting it on their skin. When a person is exposed to the allergen, a series of events create the allergic reaction:

1. The body starts to produce an antibody called IgE.
2. The IgE antibodies attach to a mast cell (a form of blood cell). These mast cells can be found in the airways, intestines, and elsewhere. The presence of mast cells in these areas makes it more susceptible to allergen exposure.
3. The allergens bind to the IgE that is attached to the mast cell. This causes the mast cells to release a number of chemicals into the blood. One of these chemicals is histamine, which causes most of the symptoms of an allergic reaction.

## Symptoms of Spring Allergies<sup>3</sup>

The symptoms of spring allergies include:

- Runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Itchy eyes and nose
- Dark circles under the eyes



Airborne allergens can also trigger **asthma**, a condition where the airways narrow, making breathing difficult and leading to coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.



## Treatment/Management for Spring Allergies

### Medications to Treat Allergies<sup>3</sup>

- **Antihistamines**
  - Reduces sneezing, sniffing, and itching by lowering the amount of histamine in the body.
  - Examples: Claritin<sup>®</sup>, Allegra<sup>®</sup>, Zyrtec<sup>®</sup>, Benadryl<sup>®</sup>
  - Benadryl<sup>®</sup> is not recommended for use in the elderly.
- **Decongestants**
  - Clears mucus out of the nasal passageways to relieve congestion and swelling.
  - Use with caution if you have high blood pressure.
  - Example: Sudafed<sup>®</sup>
- **Antihistamine/Decongestants Combination**
  - Examples: Claritin-D<sup>®</sup>, Zyrtec-D<sup>®</sup>, Allegra-D<sup>®</sup>
  - Use with caution if you have high blood pressure.
- **Nasal Spray Decongestants**
  - Relieves congestion and may clear clogged nasal passages faster than oral decongestants.
  - Do not use for longer than 3 days or congestion may worsen.
  - Example: Afrin<sup>®</sup>
- **Steroid Nasal Sprays**
  - Reduces inflammation
  - Examples: Flonase<sup>®</sup>, Nasacort<sup>®</sup>, Rhinocort<sup>®</sup>
  - Flonase<sup>®</sup> and Nasacort<sup>®</sup> are currently available over the counter.
- **Cromolyn Sodium Nasal Spray**
  - Prevents hay fever by stopping the release of histamine before it can trigger allergy symptoms.
  - Example: NasalCrom<sup>®</sup>
- **Eye Drops**
  - Relieves itchy, watery eyes
  - Example: Visine<sup>®</sup>

### Non-Medication Management<sup>3</sup>

- **Natural Therapies**
  - **Nasal Irrigation**
    - Irrigation of the nasal passages with a combination of warm water, salt, and baking soda used to clear out mucus and open sinus passages.
    - May administer with a squeeze bottle or neti-pot device.
    - Use distilled or sterile water to make up the irrigation solution.
    - Rinse irrigation device after each use and leave open to air dry.
- **Tips to Help Avoid Allergens**
  - Try to stay indoors whenever the pollen count is very high
    - Pollen counts usually peak in the mornings.
  - Keep your doors and windows closed whenever possible during the spring months to keep allergens out. An air purifier may help.
  - Clean the air filter in your home often. Clean areas where pollen can collect (eg. bookshelves, vents).
  - Wash your hair after going outside, because pollen can collect there.
  - Refrain from hanging clothes out to dry during the pollen season.
  - Vacuum twice a week. Wear a mask, because vacuuming can kick up allergens trapped in the carpet (pollen, mold, dust).

### References

1. Seasonal Allergies. (2014, December 30). Retrieved March 23, 2015, from <http://acaai.org/allergies/types/seasonal>
2. Allergies. (2011, February 2). Retrieved March 23, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainmented/tips/allergies.html>
3. WebMD Allergy Guide - Better Information for Better Health. (n.d.). Retrieved March 23, 2015, from <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/guide/default.htm>



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Please let us know how we are doing by filling out a survey at the following link:

[https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_3DXRxyUp8KC7Lzn](https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3DXRxyUp8KC7Lzn)

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## State Wellness Center

101 S. Union Street  
Montgomery, AL 36104

All active employees, covered spouses of active employees, non-Medicare retirees and covered non-Medicare spouses of retirees that use the State Employees' Health Insurance Plan (Group 13000) as their primary insurance plan are eligible for a wellness premium discount. Each wellness plan year is November 1 through October 31.

SEIB and Local Government employees along with SEIB retirees are able to use the State Wellness Center Pharmacy. The pharmacy offers various over the counter products at discounted prices and a **free medication delivery service**. Delivery can be provided to the patients located in Montgomery. Please designate which site you would like your medication delivered to, and if it is to your residence someone must be available at the home to receive the delivery.

## State Wellness Center Healthcare Clinic

The SEIB clinic has a quality healthcare **TEAM** that includes nurse practitioners, an ambulatory care pharmacist, a physician, and nurses who work closely together to take care of your health and wellness needs.

### **Services Include:**

- Treat minor illnesses
- Provide health education & monitoring
- Check health progress between appointments
- Share information with your physician
- Monitor efficacy & safety of every medication
- Evaluate out of pocket medication expense
- Smoking cessation & weight loss services
- Diabetes education program
- Immunizations & injectable medications
- Develop a personalized medication plan
- Monitor control of chronic illnesses
- Medication check-ups
- Medication therapy management