



# SPRING ALLERGY SEASON IS AROUND THE CORNER!

**S**pring allergy season hit Kansas hard last year. People who normally wouldn't even notice the change of season experienced watery eyes and sneezing. Allergy sufferers were forced to limit visits to the park or other outdoor activities because the sneezing, stuffiness and general misery of allergy symptoms were overwhelming.

## Q Will pollen counts be high this year?

**A** Whether pollen counts will be high again this year or settle back into what is considered to be a normal range remains to be seen. Seasonally and daily, weather conditions impact pollen counts, making it difficult to predict pollen counts more than a few days in advance.

## Q How does the weather affect pollen counts?

**A** On windy days, or for days after high winds, pollen counts are high because the pollen has been spread throughout the air. The dry, flat terrain of Kansas provides excellent conditions for pollen dispersal. Pollen counts fall as the rain showers wash pollen out of the air.

## Q What kinds of allergies are affected by high pollen counts?

**A** Though high pollen counts can affect numerous types of allergies, from eye allergies (conjunctivitis) to skin reactions (dermatitis), the most common spring allergy is allergic rhinitis. Patients with asthma may also experience attacks in tandem with flare up of nasal allergies, or while exercising outdoors.

## Q How many people are affected by allergic rhinitis?

**A** Frequently called hay fever, seasonal allergic rhinitis affects 35 million people in the United States. It is triggered by allergens, substances that initiate an allergic response, such as tree and grass pollens or mold spores.

## Q What happens when people experience allergic rhinitis and what are the symptoms?


**A** When people who have allergic rhinitis inhale these allergens, they combine with an allergic antibody called immunoglobulin E (IgE). Normally present at very low levels in the body, IgE is found in larger quantities in people who have allergies.

When the allergen and the IgE combine in the lining of the nose, eyes, or bronchial tubes, the result is the release of chemicals, including histamine. These chemicals cause the allergic symptoms of sneezing, itching, watery eyes, nasal congestion or headaches as the body tries to fight off the foreign allergen.

## Q How do seasonal allergies affect quality of life and the economy?

**A** Seasonal allergies have a large impact on not just quality of life, but the economy. Missed work days because of allergies cost U.S. companies more than \$250 million a year. Asthma is the number one cause of missed days of school in children ages 5–18 years.

## Q What can I do to minimize the impact seasonal allergies have on my life?

**A** Allergies, particularly in the spring, have a huge impact across the country. Fortunately, medical treatment is usually very effective. To prevent or reduce symptoms of spring time allergies, take your allergy medications as directed by your doctor. Antihistamines are usually sufficient to help mild allergy sufferers, but more stubborn allergy symptoms may require corticosteroid nasal sprays. For those who are known allergy sufferers, it is wise to start these medications now, before the pollens (trees & grasses) and mold spores begin to rise to levels that produce symptoms. 



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