

HEALTH

Allergy Season Hits with Vengeance

Bringing itchy eyes, stuffy noses and fatigue

(AP) -- There may be a whiff of truth to claims by allergy sufferers who sniffle that this season is, well, a bigger headache than years past.

And now, more bad news: It's also lasting longer, prolonging the misery of the millions of people for whom spring is a punishment, not a pleasure.

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. The deluges and, in some places, flooding have pumped up the volume on mold. Add in the wind, and the suffering skyrockets.

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

What is certain is that allergy seasons in general have been getting longer and more challenging, said Angel Waldron, spokeswoman for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation.

"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."



Blooming flowers mean the allergy season is here. Allergy specialists around the country say this season's wet spring has been a bad one for creating a high pollen count.

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. But everything is ripe this year for a historic season.

The highest tree pollen count in three years triggered a dangerous air quality warning Friday in Chicago, where allergist Dr. Joseph Leija warned in a statement: "Itchy eyes, stuffy noses and fatigue will be common among Chicagoans with sensitive respiratory systems."

In Los Angeles, rain, a heat wave and the Santa Ana winds combined for a brutal stretch in February. To north in San Jose, pollen counts are on the rise with the start of grass season, allergist Dr. Alan Heller said Friday.

HEALTHWATCH

Empowerment through Relaxation -- Free informal meditation classes that address breathing techniques, some gentle ancient African yoga poses and mental balancing techniques. People have left these classes joyful and with a peaceful view of their lives. Call Dr. Marcelitte Failla at 503-228-6140.

Tenderfoot Care -- Treat your feet with a soak, nail trim, buffing and massage from a licensed nurse at one of six clinics or at your home. Call 503-251-6303 for more information.

Cancer Resource Center -- Providence St. Vincent Medical Center and the American Red Cross have joined forces to create the first in-hospital resource center providing books, printed material, computer access and more for individuals and families dealing with cancer. The center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Lead Poisoning Prevention -- Learn how to protect your family from lead poisoning. Ideal for folks in live in older homes with children or pregnant women. Qualified participants receive a free kit of safety and testing supplies. Call 503-284-6827.

Parenting Classes -- Newborns don't come with instruction manuals but parents and parents-to-be can learn about a variety of topics from pain and childbirth to breastfeeding to infant CPR and much more. For a schedule of events, call 503-574-6595 or visit: providence.org/classes.

Powerful Tools For Caregivers -- 6-week educational series designed to help family caregivers take care of themselves while caring for relatives or friends with chronic illness. Class size is limited, and registration is required. Call 503-413-8018.

Leg Alert Screening -- Check for peripheral arterial disease with this safe, simple screening using ankle and arm blood pressure. The fee is \$40. To schedule an appointment, call 503-251-6137.

Smoke-Free Support Group -- Meets Mondays, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. For information, call 503-256-4000.

Heart Talk Support Group -- Meets on the second Monday of each month; from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, call 503-251-6260.

Family Caregiver Support Group -- This topic-oriented group offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges and rewards of providing care to an older relative or friend. Meets the first Thursday of each month at 3 p.m. at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital.

Chronic Pain Support Group -- Meets the first Wednesday at 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the third Wednesday of each month, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call 503-256-4000.



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