

Achoo! Spring Allergy Season Worst in Years

Pollen Counts Reach Record Levels Nationwide -- And the Worst Is Yet to Come

By **MARC LALLANILLA**



April 19, 2006 — April is the cruelest month — just ask any seasonal allergy sufferer. But this April is especially pitiless, since a mild, wet winter in many parts of the country caused an early start to what has become a record-setting allergy season.

Earlier this month, the Atlanta Allergy & Asthma Clinic recorded the second-highest daily pollen count since measuring began in 1995. Texans suffered through the worst mountain cedar pollen season in 10 years. And allergic Ohioans report an early spring in the region has them coughing and sneezing weeks ahead of schedule.

The worst, according to many allergists, is yet to come. "You'll have grasses in June, then weeds in August and September," said Dr. Christopher C. Randolph, allergist at the Center for Allergy & Immunology in Waterbury, Conn.

The Northeast, too, has seen more allergy sufferers seeking relief for their symptoms. "We had all that heavy snow, and when that melts, that helps," Randolph said.

"Anytime you have a lot more precipitation, you're going to have higher pollen counts, and we're going to be seeing a lot more people. We probably see double the number of patients this time of year, maybe more," Randolph added.

Top 10 Allergy Capitals: Misery Heads North

The Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America has listed the top 10 spring allergy cities in the country. In years past, most of the worst cities for allergies have been in the Southeast, but this year several northern cities top the list.

The AAFA 2006 spring allergy capitals are:

- Hartford, Conn.
- Greenville, S.C.
- Boston
- Detroit
- Orlando, Fla.
- Knoxville, Tenn.
- Omaha, Neb.
- Sacramento, Calif.
- Washington, D.C.
- Baltimore

The listings are based on pollen counts, medication use per capita and the number of board-certified allergists in the area.

Randolph blames much of the suffering on shifting weather patterns. "Clearly, the last few seasons have been more severe," he said. "We're going to be seeing a lot more of this."

New Pollen-Busters Now Available

But people can fight back against the wheezing and misery of allergies. "There are simple things they can do," said Randolph.

Most allergists recommend staying indoors in the morning, when pollen and mold counts are highest. Late afternoon and early evenings are usually the safest times to go outside.

Other ways to avoid spring pollens include keeping windows closed at night, driving with car windows closed, avoiding yard work, and washing hair regularly. Over-the-counter, non-sedating antihistamines are also very useful. "Those are agents that are very safe to take," Randolph said.

In addition to these practical measures, allergists have some new weapons in their arsenal. There are new medications, according to Randolph, that directly combat immunoglobulin E, the antibody that causes the immune reactions that include sneezing and congestion.

And the itchy, watery eyes that make life miserable for allergic people may soon be a thing of the past. "We actually have agents that block allergic chemicals in the eye and they also include antihistamines," said Randolph.