

# Chicago's reputation as one of 'worst place to live with spring allergies' just got worse

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Budding trees and greening grass may bring a sigh of relief to some Chicagoans, but for 40 million other Americans the signs of spring leave them gasping for breath.

The “100 worst cities for allergies in the United States” was recently released and Chicago went from a 2010 ranking of 83 to a more unpleasant ranking of 78 this year.

“Tree [pollen](#) is already unseasonably high, rising by 50 percent in one day, between April 11 and April 12,” said Joseph Leija, MD, an allergist who performs the Gottlieb [Allergy](#) Count, the official allergy count for the Midwest. “Patients are crowding in my office complaining that the roofs of their mouths itch and they can’t stop their runny noses.”

From April to October, Dr. Leija records the daily allergy count for tree, mold, grass and weed pollens for the National Allergy Bureau from his office at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital in Melrose Park.

“The winds blowing east over Lake Michigan help move a lot of pollen out of our system or our counts would be much higher,” Dr. Leija said. “Still, ‘the Windy City’ is ‘the Sneezing City’ and I predict Chicagoans will experience one of the worst allergy seasons ever.”

According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) the Top 5 worst cities for springtime allergies this year are:

1. Knoxville, Tenn.
2. Louisville, Ky.
3. Charlotte, N.C.
4. Jackson, Miss.
5. Chattanooga, Tenn.

“The worst cities are always in the South where the temperatures are warmer and the plant life flowers earliest,” Dr. Leija said. “The yellow pollen that will soon blanket the South will result in wispy, white cottonwood blossoms here in Chicago that resemble snow.”

The AAFA rankings are based on scientific analysis of three factors for the 100 largest metro areas in the U.S:

- Pollen scores (airborne grass/tree/weed pollen and mold spores)
- Number of allergy medications used per patient
- Number of allergy specialists per patient

### Know Your Numbers

The Gottlieb Allergy Count is made available to the public in English, Spanish and Polish through Twitter and on the Gottlieb Web site [www.GottliebHospital.org](http://www.GottliebHospital.org) and in English and Spanish at the Gottlieb Allergy Hotline (1-866-4-POLLEN and 1-866-ALERGIA).

By knowing the counts for tree, [grass](#), weed, mold, pollen and ragweed, allergy sufferers can control their symptoms through behavior

modification and by tailoring their medication with the help of their physician. The Gottlieb Allergy Count is used by area weather reporters who rely on Dr. Leija as the regional expert on allergies.

### Peak Pollen Alert Tips

Dr. Leija and the National Allergy Bureau recommend the following preventive measures for those with allergies during allergy season:

- Minimize outdoor activity when pollen counts are high. Peak pollen times are usually between 7 and 10 a.m.
- Shut windows in your house on days when pollen counts are high. Use your air conditioner for temperature control instead.
- When gardening or mowing the lawn, wear a filter mask.
- Wash your hair at night before sleeping to remove excessive pollen and potential allergens that could cause irritation.
- Gently rinse the inside of your nose with a saline solution to remove trapped particles.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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