

Warm weather triggers early allergy season

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Sneezing isn't the only concern, with ticks and mosquitoes already active.

(HealthDay) -- While unseasonably warm weather delights many people, those with allergies may not be as thrilled with the early arrival of spring.

Arriving along with those beautiful blooms is plenty of pollen that has [hay-fever](#) sufferers sneezing at least a few weeks sooner than normal.

And, in some areas, not only is the season starting early, but the [pollen counts](#) are breaking records. Several days ago, Atlanta's pollen count reading was 9,369 particles of pollen per cubic meter, which is 55 percent higher than the old record high set in 1999. Normally, anything above 1,500 is considered high in the Atlanta area, according to the American College of Asthma, [Allergy](#) and Immunology (ACAAI).

"Tree pollen in some parts of eastern U.S. started in early February, which is about three to four weeks early, and some areas have had record high counts for days and weeks. For the one in four people who has

allergies, this is having a cumulative effect. The longer you get exposure, the worse the problem becomes," explained Dr. James Sublett, an [allergist](#) and spokesman for the ACAAI.

He said mold counts haven't been high yet, but normally in the winter, mold is gone once the ground freezes. "We've had some mold counts in the moderate range here in Louisville, Ky., and because of the nice weather people are outside more. Again, it's that continuous exposure that makes allergies even worse."

And, humans aren't the only ones enjoying the warmer weather. Ticks and mosquitoes that are normally dormant at this time of the year are already active, according to Richard Ostfeld, a senior scientist with the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, N.Y.

"Adult ticks have been active all winter long. The warm winter weather changed their behavior, but so far there's no evidence that it's changed their abundance. And, given the mildness of the winter, there could be a better over-winter survival of mosquitoes," Ostfeld said. Plus, he said, mosquitoes may get a jump-start on breeding with the [warm weather](#).

If you normally use flea or tick treatments on your animals, hopefully you've started those treatments. If you haven't, now is the time, according to Ostfeld. And, it's important to be vigilant about checking yourself and children when you come in from outdoors for ticks, he said.

As for dealing with allergies, Sublett said the first line of treatment is over-the-counter antihistamines, such as Allegra, Claritin and Zyrtec. There are also nasal spray antihistamines, as well as topical nasal steroids for the treatment of allergies (most of these are available only by prescription). If you have allergies and asthma, Sublett said that montelukast (Singulair) can help treat both those problems. Singulair is only available by prescription.

Sublett said it's a good idea to visit an allergist so you can find out exactly what you're allergic to, so that you can take steps to avoid those allergens.

If you're allergic to pollen, but love to garden, Sublett said you should wear a mask (with a NIOSH N95 rating) to filter the small particles that you're bound to stir up while gardening or mowing the lawn.

He also recommended keeping your windows closed and using your air conditioner or home heating vent system to filter the air in your home. Sublett said to close the windows in your car and use the recirculated air setting in the car. In addition, be sure to change air conditioning and furnace filters frequently, and use high-efficiency filters with an 11 or 12 rating, he advised.

If you don't have a heating or air conditioning system that can filter your home's air, portable in-room air filters can work well. But, Sublett said, be sure to get one with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter that's large enough for the room you need to clean, and let it run often. He advised against the ionizing type of air cleaners as those can put ozone in the air, which isn't good for those with breathing problems.

More information: The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology is conducting free asthma and nasal allergy screenings. To locate one in your area, click [here](#).

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