

The year 2040: Double the pollen, double the allergy suffering?

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With this year's unseasonably warm temperatures and extended seasons, many have coined 2012 as being the worst for allergies. But if you thought your symptoms were worse than ever, just wait until the year 2040.

According to a study being presented by allergist Leonard Bielory, M.D., at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), [pollen](#) counts are expected to more than double by 2040.

"Climate changes will increase pollen production considerably in the near future in different parts of the country," said Dr. Bielory, ACAAI board member and fellow. "Economic growth, [global environment](#) sustainability, temperature and human-induced changes, such as increased levels of carbon dioxide, are all responsible for the influx that will continue to be seen."

In the year 2000, pollen counts averaged 8,455. Fast forward to 2040, and these counts are anticipated to reach 21,735. Researchers predict counts in 20-year increments up to the year 2100, and are incorporating various [climatic factors](#) in their models including [weather patterns](#), changes in precipitation and temperature. The study, taking place at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., is ongoing to analyze various allergenic plants being grown in climate chambers mimicking future conditions.

While pollen counts will progressively increase over the years, the study also found the sneezing season will begin earlier every year.

"In 2000, annual pollen production began on April 14, and peaked on May 1," said Dr. Bielory. "Pollen levels are predicted to peak earlier on April 8, 2040. If allergy sufferers begin long-term treatment such as immunotherapy (allergy shots) now, they will have relief long before 2040 becomes a reality."

An earlier report by the same researchers demonstrated an increase in ragweed pollen in a section of the country, from Texas to the Canadian border, over the past 25 years. This was associated with an increase of ragweed pollen by two to three weeks as one moves north.

ACAAI allergists recommend allergy sufferers begin treating their symptoms with over-the-counter or prescribed medications two weeks before symptoms usually start. While there isn't a cure for allergies, immunotherapy is the only treatment that can prevent disease progression. It can also result in health care savings of 41 percent.

For allergy sufferers looking to combat seasonal symptoms, ACAAI suggests:

- Know your triggers. You may think you know that pollen is causing your suffering, but other substances may be involved as well. More than two-thirds of seasonal [allergy sufferers](#) actually have year-round symptoms. An allergist can help you find the source of your suffering and treat more than just symptoms.
- Work with your allergist to devise strategies to avoid your triggers, such as:

1. Monitor pollen and mold counts—most media report this

information during allergy seasons.

2. Keep windows and doors shut at home, and in your car during allergy season.
3. Stay inside during mid-day and afternoon hours when [pollen counts](#) are highest.
4. Take a shower, wash hair and change clothing after being outdoors working or playing.
5. Wear a mask when doing outdoor chores like mowing the lawn. An allergist can help you find the type of mask that works best.

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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