

Should you be worried about the 'pollen vortex'?

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Some experts are predicting that this year's cold winter will lead to an intense period of pollination on the part of trees and grasses. This so-called 'pollen vortex' could wreak havoc on those with allergies. Credit: ALLAN FOSTER

(Medical Xpress)—After an unseasonably cold and snowy winter, Canadians can soon look forward to sunshine and warmer weather.

Allergy sufferers, however, may not be quite so happy to see spring.

That's because of what some are calling an imminent "pollen vortex" – the sudden release of pent-up pollen from plants delayed from doing so by the [cold temperatures](#).

The extended winter could also cause trees to bloom at the same time as grasses, which typically don't release their pollen until later in the season. This perfect storm of pollen could play havoc on the systems of those prone to allergies.

Susan Wasserman, however, isn't quite buying all the hype.

The professor of medicine who specializes in allergies says she hears "Worst Season Ever" warnings every year.

"Every season is dependent on [weather](#)," she explained. "We just had a quick freeze – so there goes the theory of a quick warm up."

Still, Wasserman says there is the possibility that the next few weeks could be particularly brutal for allergy sufferers.

"If we warm up in a sustained fashion, yes, the early pollinating trees are going to have a short, fast season with high levels of [pollen](#)," she said. "By the time we get to the later pollinators though – grass, ragweed – the weather is usually a bit more stable, so their [pollen counts](#) are a bit more predictable. But at the end of the day, you just never know for sure what's going to happen."

Pollen vortex or otherwise, Wasserman says her advice to [allergy sufferers](#) remains the same: take practical precautions, such as keeping doors and windows closed as much as possible, and don't suffer in silence.

"Most antihistamines are available over the counter, and there are also

good prescription medications available from your doctor," she said. "Your allergist can help you develop an effective treatment plan, but you have to recognize that you're suffering first."

Symptoms can resemble those of a common cold: itchy, watery eyes, [runny nose](#) and in extreme cases, asthma. Wasserman says that if they continue on for longer than normal, you may be experiencing allergies. That's why it's important to get tested.

"If your sleep is suffering, if your work is suffering, if you're coughing and wheezing – see your doctor. Don't make assumptions about what's happening to you."

Provided by McMaster University

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