

How climate change could make your allergies worse

July 24 2019, by Stephanie Stettz



Climate change could make things worse for people who suffer from allergies.
Credit: Pixabay

Sprouting daffodils, magnolias, and cherry blossoms serve as cues to put away puffy coats and say goodbye to winter. But for more than [50](#)

[million Americans](#) (myself included), the beautiful flowers also signal something else: the arrival of spring allergy season. Sadly, the sniffles will only get louder. As the world warms, [pollen allergies will likely get worse](#).

Allergies are the [sixth leading cause](#) of chronic illness in the U.S. Pollen can trigger [asthma attacks](#) and complicate other [respiratory diseases](#), leading to increased doctor visits and hospitalizations. Allergies cost Americans between \$3.4 billion and \$11.2 billion each year in medical expenses to say nothing of the [missed days of school or work](#). Not only can pollen make it harder to breathe, but it can increase fatigue and irritability, and reduce a person's ability to concentrate.

Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to asthma and allergy attacks, as their respiratory systems are more susceptible to environmental pollutants. And the data shows that [pollen allergies](#), asthma and respiratory issues have [increased in children](#). As of 2012, sensitization rates of children to common allergens reached 40 to 50 percent and are continuing to rise, and the number of [children with asthma doubled](#) between 1980 and 1995. Researchers have partially attributed this increase to an increase in mold, pollen, and other [harmful substances](#) in the air, but more research must be done to understand the climate drivers of allergens and asthma.

Children are not the only group more prone to allergies and asthma. African American and Hispanic families have higher rates of respiratory illness, and low-income families may not be able to afford allergy medicine or more frequent doctor visits. An increase in [air pollution](#) may well exacerbate these existing inequalities even further.

Making things worse, over the past decade, rising temperatures fueled by [carbon dioxide](#) have caused [pollen season to last 13 to 27 days longer](#) than it did just 24 years ago, meaning more time for pollen to make

allergy sufferers miserable. But carbon dioxide doesn't just crank up the Earth's thermostat, it also serves as food for plants. With more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, pollen producers are able to flourish, meaning more flowers, and potentially more asthma and allergy sufferers in the future.

While [climate change](#) may help the geraniums in your garden grow a little taller, it could inhibit the growth of the coming generations. Adding more pollen to the pollution already floating in our atmosphere means more respiratory issues in children and more missed school days, time indoors and days at the doctor's office. This increase in allergens will disproportionately hurt African Americans, Hispanics and [low-income families](#). More must be done to understand how asthma and allergy incidence will change with climate change, to ensure that proper treatment is given to those who are most vulnerable. The next generation could struggle to breathe if we don't reduce our carbon emissions.

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