

# Can severe weather changes make allergies worse?

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Although allergies are normally associated with the spring and fall, it may feel like allergy season never left this winter. From cold fronts to rainy days and back to warmer days, an allergy expert at Baylor College

of Medicine explains that it is not uncommon for frequent weather changes to worsen people's allergy symptoms.

"People who have allergies, sinusitis, asthma or any other airway inflammatory disease frequently complain that their symptoms get worse with changes in the weather, and it seems like it's when various fronts come through and there is a big temperature change," said Dr. David Corry, professor of medicine-immunology, [allergy](#) and rheumatology at Baylor.

## **Pollen**

Tree and grass [pollen](#) are one of the most common triggers for those who suffer from seasonal allergies. When the weather brings a mix of several cold and warm fronts, Corry explains that it can carry pollen in the air from other parts of the country, such as pollen from Juniper Ashe trees in West Texas.

"When fronts come from the west to the east, they can bring a lot of pollen, particularly in the 'cedar fever' season, which is roughly during mid-January to February," Corry said. "Those fronts can bring in that cedar pollen, which is extremely abundant and irritating."

## **Mold**

Another main cause of allergies is mold spores. When weather fronts bring in a series of thunderstorms, rain or other forms of precipitation, the wet environment can cause mold to bloom strongly and trigger allergy symptoms.

"The main thing that might be bothering people's allergies is mold, which can be in the air at any time of year," Corry said. "It gets worse

with major rain or precipitation, especially if a big storm like a hurricane comes through. Cases of severe allergy or asthma can skyrocket."

## **Changes in humidity**

Although research is still being done on the topic, Corry said that some studies suggest that changes in humidity levels might also trigger allergies. When a cold front comes in, the humidity can plummet after the initial rain and the nose can dry out, which can cause irritation and lead to allergic rhinitis symptoms.

## **Allergies vs. COVID-19**

With the rise of the omicron variant that appears to cause milder symptoms in those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, it might be difficult to determine whether you are experiencing COVID symptoms or allergies.

Allergies mainly cause itchy and watery eyes, runny nose, congestion and sneezing. Corry said the main differences between allergy and COVID symptoms are a fever, [sore throat](#) and itching, such as itchy eyes, nose and ears.

"Viruses, including the omicron variant of COVID-19 and the common cold, can first appear like allergies, but there are certain symptoms that help distinguish the two," Corry said. "You almost never get prominent itching with a virus, and COVID often produces fever, which you never see in allergies. A prominent sore throat also indicates a virus."

Allergies also are unlikely to cause profound tiredness, fatigue and muscle and joint aches.

If you are still unsure if you are experiencing allergies or an illness, try taking over-the-counter antihistamines to see if it helps with symptoms.

## Treatment

Corry recommends treating allergies by using over-the-counter nasal steroid sprays for up to two weeks and taking oral antihistamines like cetirizine, loratadine or fexofenadine.

If symptoms are not relieved, Corry recommends reaching out to a primary care provider or an allergist for further treatment or allergy testing.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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