

Allergy season arrived early in US. Here's how to keep pollen from ruining your spring

March 22 2024, by Devi Shastri



An oak tree with new leaf growth also shows pollen and a drop of water hanging among the branches at a park in Richardson, Texas, Thursday, March 21, 2024. The 2024 allergy season in the U.S. is starting sooner than experts expected. There are three main types of pollen that cause seasonal allergies. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall. Credit: AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez

Allergy season is here—and it's earlier and stronger than expected. More than 80 million Americans deal with itchy eyes, runny nose and other symptoms of seasonal allergies, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

The level of misery people will face depends on where they live and what they're allergic to, but there are things you can do to feel better.

Pollen counts were high early

Dr. Rachna Shah usually starts looking at pollen counts in the Chicago area in April. But she peeked at her data in mid-February, and saw tree pollen was already at a "moderate" level.

"This season has been so nuts," said Shah, an allergist and director of the [Loyola Medicine Allergy Count](#). "Granted, it was a pretty mild winter, but I didn't expect it to be so early."

Shah said she believes this season will be longer than other years, assuming the weather remains warm. Experts say climate change has led to longer and more intense allergy seasons.

Which cities have it the worst?

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America issues [an annual ranking](#) of the most challenging cities to live in if you have allergies, based on over-the-counter medicine use, pollen counts and the number of available allergy specialists. This year, the top five were Wichita, Kansas; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Greenville, South Carolina; Dallas; and Oklahoma City.

Dr. Nana Mireku is [an allergist](#) in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and said

"people are pretty miserable right now and allergists are pretty busy."

Which pollens cause allergies?

There are three main types of pollen that cause seasonal allergies. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall.

Some of the most common tree pollens that cause allergies include birch, cedar, cottonwood, maple, elm, oak and walnut, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Grasses that cause symptoms include Bermuda, Johnson, rye and Kentucky bluegrass.



The branches of an oak tree are stained with a green tint from pollen at park in

Richardson, Texas, Thursday, March 21, 2024. The 2024 allergy season in the U.S. is starting sooner than experts expected. There are three main types of pollen that cause seasonal allergies. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall. Credit: AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez

Pollen trackers can help you plan your day

The best and first step to controlling allergies is avoiding exposure. That's easier said than done when everyone wants to enjoy spring weather.

To prevent allergy issues, keep windows closed at home and in the car, avoid going out when pollen counts are highest and change clothes when you get home.

Pollen trackers can help with planning. The American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology tracks levels through a network of counting stations across the U.S. Counts are available [at its website and via email](#).

How to relieve allergy symptoms

The first thing to figure out is what specifically you're allergic to, Mireku said, and many Americans are allergic to several things at once. Allergists can run tests for different triggers.

Over-the-counter nasal sprays can help relieve symptoms, but they take a while to kick in, so it's best to start them in early March, Shah said.

Antihistamines are another option. Shah said she's seen some patients

benefit from switching to a similar brand if one stops working, but said that there isn't much broader data to back the recommendation.

For young children and people who have to take many different allergy medications, immunotherapies in the form of shots and oral drops can help desensitize the immune system to allergens, treating symptoms at their root.

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