

Highest mold count recorded for the 2014 allergy season

29 May 2014, by Stasia Thompson

The official allergy count for the Midwest today documented the highest count for mold in the 2014 allergy recording season. "The mold count is around 30,000, which is high but not at air quality alert status, which is 50,000," said Joseph Leija, MD, who founded the Gottlieb Allergy Count at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital, located outside Chicago. "The daily rains coupled with the warm, humid weather have created the perfect environment for mold."

The Gottlieb Allergy Count today is trees - moderate, mold - high, grass - high and weeds - high. "People with mold allergies may be feeling scratchy throats, nasal congestion, headaches, fatigue and runny noses," Dr. Leija said. "The tree count is slowly starting to decline, but all allergens are still at relatively high levels for the season."

In March, at the start of the 2014 allergy reporting season, Dr. Leija predicted a pollen vortex. "The pollen vortex and that noxious cyclone of allergens is here. All pollens except ragweed are now simultaneously at recordable levels triggering unhealthy reactions in those with sensitive breathing systems," he said.

Typical pollen seasons are: trees in March to May; grass in May to June; weeds/ragweed in mid-August to October and mold all season long, depending on dampness.

Leija said the continued back and forth between cold and warm temperatures combined with humidity, after the cold temperatures and snows of the polar vortex, have created what he calls the pollen vortex. "The traditional seasons for the different allergens have clumped together creating a solid front of recordable levels of pollens posing problems for those with sensitive respiratory systems," Leija said.

Every weekday morning at 4:30 a.m., for the past two decades, the now 84-year-old allergist has

climbed the stairs to the rooftop of a building on the Gottlieb Memorial Hospital campus, located just outside Chicago. There he maintains a scientific pollen-catching machine developed in Britain during WW II to detect poison in the air. The machine records air particles in 2-minute increments during a 24-hour period.

Dr. Leija takes the glass slide with the day's catch – during pollen reporting season, usually April-October – identifies and counts every spore under a microscope in his office. He uses an algorithm created by the National Allergy Bureau to arrive at the official allergy count for the Midwest by 7 a.m.

"People with respiratory conditions need to know the allergy count early in the morning so they can take the right medication and make adjustments in their routine to improve their health," said Leija, who supplies the local media and the public with the numbers at no charge. "Several broadcast networks and Chicago's largest newspaper report the Gottlieb Allergy Count daily so I am up at 4 a.m. to get the process started."

Dr. Leija is the only allergist certified by the National Allergy Bureau to report the official allergy count of the Midwest. He follows a complex series of algorithms to arrive at the daily [allergy count](#) and his numbers are used by the association in their daily national reports of allergy activity.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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