

## Fact Sheets: Seasonal Allergies in Children

Spring and summer months bring along with the nice weather, seasonal allergies. Children can also suffer from hay fever.

Here are some tips and facts about seasonal allergies:

### About Allergies

- The tendency to develop allergies is hereditary, in other words, tends to run in families. If both parents have allergies, there is a 75- 80% chance that their children will develop allergies. If one parent is allergic, then the chance of an allergy developing in his/her child is about 40%.
- Usually children develop seasonal allergies after 5-6 years of age. Before that, the most common sign of allergy is asthma, which begins most frequently between the ages of 1-3 years.

- **The symptoms of summer/seasonal allergy can be broken down into three main groups:**

1. Nasal: runny or stuffy nose, itchy nose, itchy palate (the top of the mouth), frequent sneezing.
2. Eye symptoms: redness, itchy and/or runny eyes. Sometimes these symptoms make a child very uncomfortable.
3. Asthma: symptoms include wheezing, cough and/or difficulty breathing.

- Nasal allergies and asthma are related in two ways. One is that they are caused or triggered by the same allergens or irritants. Second, symptoms of nasal allergies actually make asthma symptoms harder to control. Contrary to the term "Hay fever", fever is NOT a symptom of seasonal allergies.

### Causes of Seasonal Allergies

The most common pollens causing spring/summertime allergies include:

- Tree pollens (APRIL-JUNE): Maple, Ash, Oak, Elm, Birch and Cedar. When they pollinate depends on the area in which you live.
- Grasses (JUNE-JULY): Kentucky Blue grass, Rye, Orchard and Timothy. Grass allergies are worsened when the grass (lawn) is mowed.
- Ragweed (MID-AUGUST-OCTOBER): Ragweed pollen is such an important cause of seasonal allergies.

### Approaching Seasonal Allergies

Take action against your indoor and outdoor allergens. Nasal allergies can be bothersome at times. It's nearly impossible to eliminate every allergen from home. However, you can take steps to make it a more friendly environment, even during allergy season.

- During the summer months, pollen levels fluctuate from day to day, but seem to be higher during hot humid days.
- Keeping all doors and windows closed as much as possible during the pollen season will prevent the pollen from entering the home.
- Air conditioners help this as they can filter out the pollen. Additionally windows need to be closed during air conditioner use.
- The only way to determine whether a child has a seasonal allergy and to which specific pollen he or she is allergic to is a skin prick allergy test or a special blood test called RAST. Identifying exactly what a child is allergic to can help us better prepare for the seasonal allergy period(s). Knowing which pollens an asthmatic

child is allergic to can help parents better prepare for the summer allergy season by starting preventative medications just before the particular pollen starts to become airborne in high concentrations.

### **Treating Seasonal Allergies**

- When using allergy medications parents should be aware that these treat the symptoms and not the cause of the allergy in their children. The best approach is to identify and then avoid what a child is specifically allergic to.
- Antihistamine medications given by mouth as needed can help certain children with allergic symptoms. While the older antihistamines caused sleepiness, the newer ones tend not to. It is a good idea to avoid antihistamines that make a child drowsy or sleepy during the day.
- Today specific "anti-allergic" eye drops containing **anti-histamines** can help relieve eye symptoms.
- Inhaled nasal preparations (pumps) containing steroids are considered to be safe and effective in children who suffer from nasal allergies. These medications are effective if used regularly for a period of time. Using inhaled nasal steroids on and off irregularly is not very effective.
- Over the counter nasal decongestant sprays are generally not recommended in children. In fact prolonged use of these medications may actually make matters worse.
- Asthma symptoms brought on by seasonal pollens are treated with the appropriate asthma medications as they will not respond to the antihistamine (anti-allergic) medications.

Yours in health,

The AAS Medical Staff