

## COVID-19 & Allergies

### Allergies or COVID-19?

With spring setting in and temperatures warming up, allergy season is on the rise. It may be an uncomfortable time for allergy sufferers to be experiencing allergy symptoms as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

According to National Jewish Health Allergist, Flavia Hoyte, MD, “Most people who have allergies know what their allergies feel like and when they tend to peak.”

### Common Allergy Symptoms

- Itchy, watery and/or red eyes
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Postnasal drip
- Sneezing
- Itching of the skin



Some allergy symptoms, like nasal congestion or runny nose, also can be symptoms of viral infections such as a cold or COVID-19. With COVID-19, however, allergy-like symptoms are usually accompanied by respiratory symptoms and a fever.

Allergies generally will not affect the lungs, but can trigger asthma in people with allergic asthma. Allergies also typically do not cause a fever or extreme fatigue.

“Individuals who have never had springtime allergies and are suddenly miserable from nasal symptoms and/or fatigue should consider contacting their providers,” said Dr. Hoyte.

### Pollen Season

By the end of March, allergy patients are already experiencing heightened allergy symptoms, according to Dr. Hoyte. “In Denver, March is the middle of tree pollen season. Tree pollen is high and will continue this way for the next couple of months.” Each tree’s pollen peak at slightly different times, so allergy symptoms may vary month-to-month or may develop a few months in a row for patients.

The next pollen season is grass in summer months, followed by weed pollen season in the fall until the first hard frost.

Pollen counts are affected by the weather. “The weather needs to be warm enough to encourage plant growth and pollination,” said Dr. Hoyte. “Windy days cause pollen to blow around, making it more likely for someone to breathe in and increase allergy symptoms.” Pollen counts also can go up after it rains because the rain helps plants grow. While it rains, though, pollen counts are lower which may give those with allergies a break from symptoms.

## Remember Not to Touch Your Face

It can be very tempting to rub your eyes when they water or wipe your nose as it runs. However, it is very important to avoid touching the face even if you think it's only allergies causing your symptoms. The COVID-19 virus and other viruses are easily contracted when germs are transferred from the hand to the eyes, nose or mouth. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and then use a tissue to wipe your eyes or nose. Discard the tissue immediately after and wash your hands again.

## When to Seek Medical Attention

Generally, Dr. Hoyte advises patients with mild allergy symptoms to treat those with regular allergy medicine or other over the counter medications at home.

Dr. Hoyte recommends reaching out to a primary care provider if:

- symptoms do not improve with allergy medications
- symptoms worsen despite medication
- breathing problems or a fever develop

“Patients should discuss with their care provider whether any of the symptoms they’re experiencing could represent COVID-19 rather than allergies and whether they need to be seen,” explained Dr. Hoyte.

Patients with mild allergy symptoms should avoid going to urgent care centers or the emergency room. Resources at these facilities are needed by individuals with more severe symptoms or who need to be hospitalized. Doctor Hoyte says, “If someone isn’t sure whether they have COVID-19, they could actually put themselves at risk of getting the virus by going to an emergency room or urgent care.”

Check in with your primary care provider or allergist if you are concerned about the severity of your symptoms. If you believe you need medical evaluation or to be tested for COVID-19, contact your primary care provider first.

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

© Copyright 2020

NOTE: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish Health. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

**National Jewish Health** is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 121 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit [njhealth.org](http://njhealth.org).