

# Seasonal Allergies

## **What are Allergies?**

Seasonal allergies, sometimes called “hay fever” or seasonal allergic rhinitis, are allergy symptoms that occur during certain times of the year, usually in the spring and fall when outdoor mold release their spores and trees, grasses and weeds release tiny pollen particles into the air to fertilize other plants.

The immune system of people who are allergic to mold spores or pollen treat these particles (called allergens) as invaders and release chemicals, including histamine, into the blood stream to defend against them. It is the release of these chemicals by the body that causes the allergy symptoms.

People can be allergic to one or more types of pollen or mold. The type of allergen a person is allergic to determines when symptoms occur. For example, in the Mid- Atlantic states (including New Jersey), tree pollen is most prevalent from February to May, grass pollen is prevalent from May through June and weed pollens is prevalent from August to October – so people with allergies to these allergens will have increased symptoms during these times.

## **Signs and symptoms**

If you or your child develops a cold at the same time every year, seasonal allergies might be to blame.

### **Allergy symptoms can include:**

Sneezing

Itchy nose or throat

Nasal congestion

Clear, runny nose

Coughing

Itchy, watery eyes (called allergic conjunctivitis)

If your child has wheezing and shortness of breath in addition to these symptoms, the allergy may have progressed to asthma.

Even children who have never had seasonal allergies in the past can develop them. Seasonal allergies can start at any time but they usually develop by 10 years of age and reach their peak in the early twenties, with symptoms sometimes disappearing in adulthood.

### **Treatment (or how to feel better) :**

There is no real cure for seasonal allergies, but it is possible to relieve symptoms. Start by reducing or eliminating exposure to allergens.

During allergy season:

- keep windows closed
- use air conditioning if possible
- stay indoors when pollen counts are high.

Other ways to decrease or eliminate exposure to allergens include:

Wash your hands and face often to remove pollen

Shower and change clothing after being outside

Change your pillow case DAILY to prevent inhaling pollen that may be on the back of your head at night

Anyone with seasonal allergies should not mow the lawn (this tends to kick up pollen and mold spores) and should stay indoors while others are mowing.

If reducing exposure is not possible or is ineffective, medicines can help decrease allergy symptoms.

These medications may include decongestants, antihistamines and nasal sprays.

If symptoms cannot be managed with medication, the doctor may recommend seeing an allergist (a physician specializing in the treatment of allergies)