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SPRING INTO ALLERGY & ASTHMA SEASON

by Mark Millar, MD

It's time for the season most Michiganders eagerly await: SPRING! The good news is with the warmer weather we can participate in more outdoor activities. The bad news is spring also starts the season of certain asthma triggers. This time of year tiny particles called pollen are released from trees and grasses and take flight on currents of air. Although their job is to fertilize parts of other plants, many never reach their targets. Instead, they enter human noses, throats and airways, and in sensitive individuals, can trigger an allergic reaction. Humidity levels also rise in the spring, which helps mold and dust mites (tiny, microscopic relatives of the spider usually found in household dust, bed linens, pillows, mattresses, and carpets), which grow well when the humidity level is over 50 percent. Pollen, dust mites, and mold are common asthma triggers and can make themselves known this time of year by triggering sneezing, coughing and wheezing.

Before the spring season gets into full swing, it's a good idea to schedule an appointment with your asthma doctor. To prevent and treat allergy-triggered asthma symptoms, you may need to have your Asthma Action Plan changed to reflect your springtime asthma needs. This can include taking allergy medication, starting a controller medication, or increasing your controller medication to help you through this time. Try using the tips below to help you breathe easier this spring:

- ▶ Check the pollen forecast on television or in the newspaper. If pollen or mold counts will be high, think about staying indoors. Close windows and use air conditioning if possible.
- ▶ In general, pollen counts may be highest between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. You might want to plan outdoor activities before or after these times.
- ▶ Mowing the lawn or raking can create clouds of pollen and spores. If someone else cannot do this work, think about wearing a mask over your face. When done, change your clothes and shower to remove pollen from your hair and skin.
- ▶ Avoid leaving clothes or linens outdoors to dry, as they can collect pollens and mold spores.
- ▶ Leave car windows up when driving if possible.



- ▶ Keep furry pets out of the house. Pollen and spores collect on their fur when they're out and are then carried back into the house.
- ▶ Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50 percent. Use a dehumidifier if needed.
- ▶ Vacuum and damp-dust weekly (asthmatics out of the house!).

If problems persist despite avoiding triggers and proper use of medications, talk with your doctor. There may be other medication plans that are right for you, or you may need to think about allergy immunotherapy injections (allergy shots).

Dr. Millar is an allergy-immunology specialist practicing in Grand Rapids. He also serves as the president of the Pediatric and Adult Asthma Network of West Michigan.

To prevent and treat allergy-triggered asthma symptoms, you may need to take an allergy medication, start taking an asthma controller medication, or increase the dose of your current controller medication.



- ▶ Michigan's pollen season is estimated to begin in March with the release of tree pollen. Grass, weed, and ragweed pollen seasons follow, all ending by October.¹
- ▶ More than 50% of people with asthma have allergic rhinitis (hay fever).²
- ▶ During the spring months, the average rate of asthma hospitalization among Michigan children under 18 years old is 5.7 per 10,000 population. For adults (over 18), the average rate is 3.3 per 10,000 population.³

1. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, Inc. The Allergy Report, Overview of Allergic Diseases: Diagnosis, Management, and Barriers to Care. 2000; 1: 1-20.

2. Hannaway PJ. Asthma- An Emerging Epidemic. Massachusetts: Lighthouse Press, 2002.

3. Michigan Inpatient Database (1997-2001), Bureau of Epidemiology, Michigan Department of Community Health, Asthma hospitalization defined as a primary discharge diagnosis of Asthma, ICD-9-CM = 493.XX.

ASTHMA COALITION COLUMN



Coalitions Gather at April Summit

Michigan's 12 local asthma coalitions will be holding their bi-annual Summit on April 14 at the Henry Center for Executive Development in Lansing.

Rich Badics, a member of the Washtenaw Asthma Coalition, encourages coalition members to attend. "I have always enjoyed going to the Summits. I come away with a much better understanding of what others are doing to fight asthma in Michigan, and how we can implement these approaches locally. I highly recommend it!"

The Summits have been held since 1999, offering opportunities for learning and sharing ideas. The sharing portion for the April Summit has been expanded. Coalitions have been invited to share short presentations about their successful programs. After these presentations, coalition members will have an opportunity to network with each other, and get their individual questions answered.

Participants at this Summit will also hear an update on the new Michigan Consortium of Asthma Coalitions, and find out about other statewide activities. Plans for World Asthma Day 2003 will also be featured.

Attendance at the Summit is free, and pre-registration is required. If you have questions about, or want to register for the Summit, contact Tisa via e-mail: tvoice@voyager.net or by phone: 517-484-7206 or 1-866-395-8647 (toll free).



Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

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SPRING TECHNIQUE TIP:

Dot the MDIs

To make it clear which inhaler should be taken for symptoms and which for long-term control, try this:

Put a green dot on the controller medication: a cue to take that one in the green zone. Put yellow and red dots on the quick-relief medication: use that one in the yellow and red zones.

ASTHMA EDUCATOR UPDATE

Nine Michigan health care professionals are among the first 200 certified asthma educators in the United States. They can now use the credential AE-C after their names. Congratulations to these Michigan asthma educators!

The NAECB will provide two oral presentations at the June Asthma 2003 Conference in Washington D.C. The presentations will cover the asthma educator job analysis study and an update of NAECB activities.



MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

April

- 7 **Asthma Information Review (AIR) Course**, Lansing Center, Lansing
7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m., for more info: 734-677-6772
- 8 **MSRC Seminar - Asthma Track**, Lansing Center, Lansing
1:30 to 3:40 p.m., for more info: 734-677-6772
- 14 **Summit of MI Asthma Coalitions**, Henry Center for Executive Development, Lansing, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., free, for more info: 517-484-7206

May

- 6 **Asthma Update - info for asthmatics**, Alcona Health Center, Alpena
9 to 11 a.m., free, must pre-register, for more info: 989-736-8157
- 7 **World Asthma Day Event**, "New" Detroit Science Center, Detroit
4 to 8 p.m., free, for more info: 248-784-2020

June

- 19- **National Conference on Asthma 2003**, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel
21 Washington D.C., for more info: www.asthma2003.net

Visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org for more information about asthma events & trainings in your area.