

Pollen avoidance

Information for patients

Hay fever is the most common allergy, affecting one in five people. This information sheet explains what the pollen count is and what you can do to minimise your exposure to pollen.

What is pollen?

Plants use pollen to fertilise their flowers. Wind pollinated plants such as trees and grasses, are the main things that cause allergic symptoms. Their pollen grains are tiny and are dispersed in vast quantities.

It is useful to know which pollen you are allergic to as this can help you start preventive measures or treatment.

What is the pollen count?

The pollen count is the average number of pollen grains in a cubic metre of air present during the previous 24 hours. Some people get hay fever symptoms when the count is as low as 10 grains/m³; others only react to a much higher count, for example, 50 grains/m³. In June and July it can be as high as 200 and the record is 800 grains/m³.

Quite often people become more sensitive as the season goes on, so it takes a smaller amount of pollen to cause problems by the end of the summer.

The pollen count is only a guide to the next day's count in that particular area if the weather conditions remain roughly the same.

When is the pollen count high?

This depends on a number of factors:

1. Pollination season
 - Trees – highest during March
 - Grass – peak June/July
 - Moulds – May to October (see diagram on page 3)
2. Time of day
 - Early morning when pollen is first shed.
 - Evening (5pm to 8pm) as the pollen in the air descends to nose level with afternoon air-cooling.
3. Weather
 - Dry conditions
 - Thunderstorms can dramatically raise pollen count by causing grains or spores to burst in huge numbers.

Where can I get information on the pollen count?

- TV and radio
- Newspapers
- Local helpline available from Pollen Research Unit (**01905 855 200**)

What can I do to minimise my exposure to pollen?

- Check the pollen count in the morning.
- Keep windows and doors shut when the pollen count is high.
- Wear sunglasses to help keep pollen grains out of your eyes and reduce the chance of developing an eye infection (conjunctivitis). This also helps as sunlight stimulates sneezing.
- After you have been outside, shower and wash your hair and change clothes as pollen is trapped in your clothes. Cats and dogs also carry a lot of pollen in their fur.
- Use an effective vacuum cleaner with micro-filter to help remove pollen grains from carpets and soft furnishings.
- Keep away from grassy areas such as parks and gardens, especially if the grass has recently been cut.
- Keep your grass well-trimmed or pave it over. The National Asthma Campaign produces a leaflet on a low allergen garden, recommending flowers and shrubs, which are insect, rather than wind, pollinated.
- Keep car windows shut when driving.
- When changing your car consider buying one with a pollen filter.
- Avoid added irritants such as smoky atmospheres and paint fumes.
- Some people find that a smear of Vaseline round the nose helps with soreness and traps pollen grains before they enter the nose.
- If you are going abroad, find out about the local hay fever season from your travel agent or Pollen Research Unit.
- Holidays by the sea or in the mountains may be more comfortable.

Moulds can also cause problems for hay fever sufferers. So:

- Get rid of damp problems within the home. Grouting and other bathroom surfaces can harbour moulds as can house plant topsoil.
- Reduce humidity by opening vents in the kitchens and bathrooms. Keep doors to these rooms closed to stop damp spreading.
- Avoid walking in woodland areas where there are lots of mould spores.
- Avoid use of compost heaps in gardens.

Treatment

- Avoidance may reduce symptoms but treatment may still be required.
- Make sure you understand your treatment, including how and when to use it.
- Tell your doctor if your symptoms are not being controlled.
- Be sure to mention any chest symptoms as hay fever can develop into asthma.

Useful contacts

British Allergy Foundation Deepdene House

Tel: **020 8303 8525**

National Asthma Campaign

Tel: **08457 010 203**

National Pollen Research Unit

Tel: **01905 855 200**

Allergy and Clinical Immunology Service contacts

Consultants:

Dr Mohammad A A Ibrahim

Dr Zoe Adhya

Dr Rohit Ghurye

Tel: **020 3299 1555**

Clinical Nurse Specialist: Dorothea Grosse-Kreul

Tel: **020 3299 5175**

Table showing when the pollen count is high:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Tree												Pollen produced soon after leaves appear
Grass										Meadow grasses worst offender		
Moulds										Particularly high in warm, humid conditions		

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

Appropriate PALS information depending on location/site will be placed in by the Publications Team.

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **kch-tr.PALS@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.