

Are we getting more allergic to things?

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Beth

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Beth.

Neil

And I'm Neil. In this episode, we're talking about allergies. Allergies are when a certain food or material makes you feel sick. Do you have any allergies, Beth?

Beth

Yeah, so I am actually allergic to dairy so I can't have anything with milk. So, no cheese, no butter. What about you, Neil? Have you got any allergies?

Neil

Well, I'm not great with dairy either, but it's not an allergy – more of an intolerance. So, it just makes me feel a bit bad rather than actually making me sick. But I do have hay fever, so I'm allergic to pollen. That means in the summer months I'm sneezing and coughing all the time. I get runny eyes and a runny nose, and it also gives me a little bit of asthma, so it's a bit of a pain.

Beth

Oh yeah, that sounds really horrible. Now, scientific evidence shows that more people are developing allergies. In this programme we're going to find out about what it's like living with an allergy and where in the world has the highest rate of allergies.

Neil

But first, I have a question for you, Beth. What is the most common allergy in the world? Is it:

- a) Peanuts?
- b) Pollen? Or
- c) Dairy?

Beth

I'm going to say pollen. A lot of people I know have hay fever.

Neil

Including me. Well, we'll find out the answer at the end of the show. Now, Beth, you're allergic to dairy, but imagine if you had over 50 allergies. That's the situation for Mia Silverman, who runs a social media account, Allergies with Mia, where she talks about living with lots of allergies.

Mia Silverman

My 50+ allergies include all nuts and their oils. I'm allergic to all fish except for cooked tuna and cooked codfish.

Beth

Life for Mia involves a lot of planning, as she told BBC World Service programme, What in the World.

Mia Silverman

And having these 50+ allergies impacts my life every single day. So, when it comes to going to restaurants: having to **call ahead of time**, talk to the manager, talk to the chef, make sure that the restaurant can **accommodate** me, that they can make me something safe and use **protocols** to prevent any sort of risk of any allergens touching my dish. When it comes to socialising, it can be kind of hard sometimes, because I want to make sure that my friends don't feel inconvenienced or feel like I'm being a burden.

Neil

If Mia wants to go to a restaurant, she has to **call ahead of time** to tell them about her allergies. If you **call ahead of time**, you phone somewhere, like a restaurant before you go. We can also say **call ahead**.

Beth

Mia needs to find out whether restaurants can **accommodate** her allergies. **Accommodate** in this context means give someone what they need.

Neil

Because Mia has so many allergies, she has to visit restaurants which have **protocols** to stop the food she is allergic to touching her meal. **Protocols** means a set of rules for a process, to make sure things are done properly.

Beth

Now, most people who have allergies don't have as many as Mia, but scientists believe more people are developing allergies. And there is one place where the number of allergies is particularly high: Australia.

Neil

In fact, Australia is called the allergy **capital of the world**. When we describe somewhere as the **capital of the world** in something, we mean that it is known for that thing. So, the allergy **capital of the world** is the place in the world with the most allergies.

Beth

BBC journalist Frances Mao is from Australia and explains some of the allergy data to BBC World Service podcast, What in the World.

Interviewer

You're from Australia, which has been called the allergy **capital of the world**. What is it about Australia in particular that is making people more allergic?

Frances Mao

Australia's termed the allergy **capital of the world** because, due to the research and the data, that shows that almost one in 10 infants have marked an allergy. And often that's a food allergy or a respiratory allergy. And that does **drop off** once they're a bit older. Age six **or so** it goes down to about 6%, and then as an adult it goes down to like 3%.

Neil

Frances talks about the high numbers of Australian infants, that's babies, who have allergies. But she says the numbers **drop off** as children get older. If numbers or rates of something **drop off**, they get lower.

Beth

By age six **or so**, Australian children are less likely to have allergies. We can use **or so** in informal speech to show that the number is an estimate: it's not exact.

Neil

So Beth, is there anything we can do about all these allergies?

Beth

Well, scientists are investigating giving babies vitamin D, which can be shown to reduce allergies. Another technique is immunotherapy, which involves scientists giving children tiny amounts of the thing they are allergic to and then building up their baby's tolerance.

Neil

Interesting! And I think it's time to find out the answer to my question. I asked you, 'What is the most common allergy in the world?'

Beth

I said pollen. Was I right?

Neil

You were right. Well done!

Beth

OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **call ahead of time**, which means to phone somewhere, like a restaurant, before your appointment or before you go there.

Neil

If you **accommodate** someone, you give them what they need.

Beth

Protocols are strict rules for how something is done.

Neil

If somewhere is the **capital of the world** for a particular thing, it is known for that thing. For example, London is sometimes called the theatre **capital of the world** because we have lots of theatres.

Beth

If numbers **drop off**, it means they get lower.

Neil

And we can add **or so** to a number in informal speech to show that the number is an estimate: it's not exact.

Beth

Once again, our six minutes are up. But you can test your knowledge even more using the interactive quiz on our website – visit bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

Bye for now!

Beth

Bye!

VOCABULARY

call ahead of time

phone before an appointment, or before going somewhere

accommodate

give someone what they need

protocols

strict rules for how something is done

(allergy) capital of the world

a place that is known for (allergies)

drop off

get lower over time

or so

used to indicate that a number is an estimate, or is not exact