

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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## Coping With Allergies

**A**llergies -- they're frustrating, irritating, sometimes life-threatening. Why are some people sensitive to the most ordinary things -- milk, nuts, dust -- while others are not?

### What Are Allergies?

Allergies are an abnormal response of the immune system. People who have allergies have an immune system that reacts to a usually harmless substance in the environment. This substance (pollen, mold, animal dander, etc.) is called an allergen.

Allergies are a very common problem, affecting at least 2 out of every 10 Americans.



### What Are the Symptoms of Allergies?

Allergy symptoms can be categorized as mild, moderate, or severe (anaphylactic).



- Mild reactions include those symptoms that affect a specific area of the body such as a rash, itchy, watery eyes, and some congestion. Mild reactions do not spread to other parts of the body.
- Moderate reactions include symptoms that spread to other parts of the body. These may include itchiness or difficulty breathing.
- A severe reaction, called anaphylaxis, is a rare, life-threatening emergency in which the response to the allergen is intense and affects the whole body. It may begin with the sudden onset of itching of the eyes or face and progress within minutes to more serious symptoms, including abdominal pain, cramps, vomiting, and

diarrhea, as well as varying degrees of swellings that can make breathing and swallowing difficult. Mental confusion or dizziness may also be symptoms, since anaphylaxis causes a quick drop in blood pressure.

### Does Everyone Have Allergies?

No. Most allergies are inherited, which means they are passed on to children by their parents. People inherit a tendency to be allergic, although not to any specific allergen. When one parent is allergic, their child has a 50% chance of having allergies. That risk jumps to 75% if both parents have allergies.

*(Over)*

## **Common Allergy Triggers**

### **Pollen**

Exposure to pollen from trees, grasses, and weeds can trigger hay fever or seasonal allergies. Symptoms include sneezing, runny nose, nasal congestion, and itchy, watery eyes.

### **Animal Dander**

Proteins secreted by oil glands in an animal's skin and present in their saliva can cause allergic reactions for some. The allergy can take two or more years to develop and symptoms may not subside until months after ending contact with the animal.

### **Dust Mites**

Dust mites are microscopic organisms that live in house dust. They thrive in areas of high humidity and feed on the dead skin cells of humans and their pets, as well as on pollen, bacteria, and fungi.

### **Insect Stings**

People who are allergic to stings can have a severe or even life-threatening reaction. Symptoms include extensive swelling and redness from the sting or bite that may last a week or more, nausea, fatigue, and low-grade fever. Rarely, insect stings may cause anaphylaxis, with symptoms including difficulty breathing, hives, swelling of the face, throat, or mouth, rapid pulse, dizziness, or a sharp drop in blood pressure.

## **Benefits Corner**

### **Wellness Check-ups and Immunizations**

For further information on allergies and related subjects, go to [www.WebMd.com](http://www.WebMd.com)

### **Medications**

Zyrtec is now available over the counter in most pharmacies and supermarket medicine isles.

### **Health Fairs**

Just a reminder, take advantage of the County Health Pool Health Fair Benefit (Up to \$40 reimbursement). In order to get reimbursed, please fill out the Health Fair claim form and attach your receipt from the fair. The claim forms are available at [www.ctsi.org](http://www.ctsi.org) or by contacting your Benefits Administrator.

### **Latex**

Latex in gloves, and certain medical devices can trigger latex allergy. Allergic reactions can range from skin redness and itching to anaphylaxis, a serious reaction which can cause difficulty breathing, hives, and sudden gastrointestinal problems.

### **Fragrance**

Fragrances found in products including perfumes, scented candles, laundry detergent, and cosmetics can have mild to severe health consequences. For some, repeated exposures cause an increase in symptoms that occur more often and last longer..

Source: [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

