

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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## Asthma and Allergy Awareness



**A**sthma and allergy are popular topics due to the increased awareness of those affected. 34 million Americans have been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lifetime and at least one out of every 5 Americans suffers from allergies.

### What is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease of the lungs in which the airways become blocked or narrowed causing breathing difficulty. This chronic disease affects 20 million Americans. Asthma is commonly divided into two types: **allergic (extrinsic)** asthma and **non-allergic (intrinsic)** asthma. There is still much research that needs to be done to fully understand how to prevent, treat and

cure asthma. But, with proper management, people can live healthy and active lives.

**Allergic (extrinsic)** asthma is characterized by symptoms that are triggered by an allergic reaction. Allergic asthma is airway obstruction and inflammation that is partially reversible with medication. Allergic asthma is the most common form of asthma, affecting



over 50% of the 20 million asthma sufferers.

**Non-Allergic (intrinsic)** asthma is triggered by factors not related to allergies. Like allergic asthma, non-allergic asthma is characterized by airway obstruction and inflammation that is at least partially reversible with medication, however symptoms in this type of asthma are NOT associated with an allergic reaction.

Many of the symptoms of allergic and non-allergic asthma are the same (coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or rapid breathing, and chest tightness). However, allergic asthma is triggered by inhaled allergens such as dust mite allergen, pet dander, pollen, mold, etc., resulting in asthma symptoms.

### What are Allergies?

Allergies are diseases of the immune system that cause an overreaction to substances called “allergens”, an overreaction of the immune system to substances that usually cause no reaction in most individuals. These substances can trigger sneezing, wheezing, coughing and itching. Allergies are not only bothersome, but many have been linked to a variety of common and serious chronic respira-

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## Asthma and Allergy . . . (Continued)

tory illnesses (such as sinusitis and asthma). Additionally, allergic reactions can be severe and even fatal. However, with proper management and patient education, allergic diseases can be controlled, and people with allergies can lead normal and productive lives.

### Common Allergic Diseases

**Allergic rhinitis** (hay fever or “indoor/outdoor,” “seasonal,” “perennial” or “nasal” allergies): Characterized by nasal stuffiness, sneezing, nasal itching, clear nasal discharge, and itching of the roof of the mouth and/or ears.

**Allergic asthma** (asthma symptoms triggered by an allergic reaction): Characterized by airway obstruction that is at least partially reversible with medication and is always associated with allergy. Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or rapid breathing, chest tightness, and occasional fatigue and slight chest pain.

**Food Allergy:** Most prevalent in very young children and frequently outgrown, food allergies are characterized by a broad range of allergic reactions. Symptoms may include itching or swelling of lips or tongue; tightness of the throat with hoarseness; nausea and vomiting; diarrhea; occasionally chest tightness and wheezing; itching of the eyes; decreased blood pressure or loss of consciousness and anaphylaxis.

**Drug Allergy:** Is characterized by a variety of allergic responses affecting any tissue or organ. Drug

## Benefits Corner

### It is Health Fair Time!

The County Health Pool provides a \$40 annual reimbursement for Health Fairs;

As a reminder, all employees will need to have the following items to receive proper reimbursement for their Health Fair claims;

Health Fair Claim Form (can be found on [www.ctsi.org](http://www.ctsi.org))

Bona fide receipt

In an effort to minimize errors in the adjudication of the CHP Health Fair Claims, we are requesting that CHP contacts collect the items listed above and submit to your Benefits Administrator. Your Benefits Administrator will make a copy and forward onto Anthem for adjudication. However, you still have an option to submit directly to Anthem for adjudication of the claim.

allergies can cause anaphylaxis; even those patients who do not have life-threatening symptoms initially may progress to a life-threatening reaction.

**Latex Allergy:** An allergic response to the proteins in natural, latex rubber characterized by a range of allergic reactions.

Persons at risk include healthcare workers, patients having multiple surgeries and rubber-industry workers. Symptoms include hand dermatitis, eczema and urticaria; sneezing and other respiratory distress; and lower respiratory problems including coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath.

Sources: [aafa.org](http://aafa.org) and [WebMD.com](http://WebMD.com).

### Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Disorder

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) Disorder is a highly controversial issue. However, MCS is not an “allergy,” but it is often confused with skin allergies, food allergies or nasal allergies.

In theory, MCS is an adverse physical reaction to low levels of some common chemicals. Chemical sensitivity is generally accepted as a reaction to chemicals but debate continues on whether MCS is classifiable as an illness. There are a number of synonyms for MCS, including “20th century disease,” “environmental illness,” “idiopathic environmental illness” and “chemical AIDS.”

Proposed theories to explain the cause of MCS include dysfunction of the immune system (but not overreaction of the immune system, such as allergy), neurobiological sensitization, and various psychological theories. There is insufficient scientific evidence to confirm a relationship between any of these possible causes and symptoms. Due to the lack of definite information an evaluation must be performed by a physician knowledgeable of the symptoms of this condition.