

# Cold or Allergies? What You Need to Know About Seasonal Allergies

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## Transcript

### [Introduction 0:00]

*Dr. Mariam Hanna:* Environmental allergies can turn a beautiful day into a real struggle. Here's what you need to know about late summer and fall allergies. I'm Dr. Mariam Hanna, an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at McMaster University, an allergist, and a clinical immunologist.

### [What are the symptoms of environmental allergies? 0:16]

*Dr. Mariam Hanna:* From watery, red eyes to nasal congestion, sneezing, and even coughing, environmental allergy symptoms can be quite significant. While these allergies are not typically dangerous, they can disrupt your daily life. Enjoying the outdoors becomes a challenge, and the discomfort can interfere with your sleep, meals, and productivity at school or work.

### [What are triggers for environmental allergies? 0:37]

*Dr. Mariam Hanna:* Fall is a uniquely challenging season for allergy sufferers, with numerous triggers that can flare up symptoms. The primary culprit for fall allergies in Ontario is ragweed. This starts pollinating in late summer and continues into the fall months, up until first frost.

Mould spores are another trigger that can flare on humid days in the summer and fall.

This season also marks the start of school and university, which often means a change in residence and new indoor environments. Dust mites and pet allergies may become more noticeable as we spend more time indoors.

### [How do you distinguish between allergies and the common cold? 1:08]

*Dr. Mariam Hanna:* Distinguishing between allergies and the common cold can sometimes be tricky. Allergies tend to have a distinct pattern. This means that patients will often have seasonal symptoms that span for weeks on end. This is much longer than would be expected with the common cold. Despite the term hay fever, fever is actually not associated with allergies and suggests an infection is the cause of your symptoms. Finally, itchy eyes, nose or throat are quite unique symptoms to allergies, which are seldom noted with a cold.

## **[How prevalent are environmental allergies, and can they change with age? 1:39]**

*Dr. Mariam Hanna:* Allergies can affect all ages, and we estimate anywhere from 20 to 25% of the Canadian population are affected by allergies, from children right through to adults. The symptoms of environmental allergies vary widely. Some individuals experience only mild symptoms, while others suffer from moderate to severe symptoms that significantly impact their daily lives.

Allergies can also change throughout your lifespan. Some patients develop allergies over time, while others resolve while they age. Some studies suggest that rising temperatures and higher carbon dioxide levels contribute to the longer growing season in allergen-producing plants.

## **[How do you best manage and treat allergies? 2:16]**

*Dr. Mariam Hanna:* For outdoor allergies, such as pollen, it's best to limit outdoor activities during times of high pollen counts. Proper diagnosis is an important first step to understanding and learning how to manage your symptoms. An allergist and immunologist will ask your medical history, conduct a physical exam, and perform allergy testing to determine exactly what you are and are not allergic to.

There are numerous treatment options available which, depending on your degree of symptoms and your treatment goals, can be discussed. Broadly speaking, treatment options include medications and immunotherapy. The goal of medications is to reduce symptoms to allow you to get through that season. There is an expanding number of over-the-counter and prescription options, including saline rinses, non-sedating antihistamines, nasal steroids, and eyedrops, amongst other medications that can be used to help improve your symptom control. Immunotherapy is a process to retrain your immune system to dampen this allergic response or flip back to a more tolerant state. Doing this not only gives you a better season and need for less medication, but the long-term goal is that you'll remain that way even after treatment is completed.

There are two main ways of doing immunotherapy for environmental allergies. These include allergy shots or melt-away pollen tablets to reduce your symptoms for the season and set you on the right path to tolerance.

The fall marks a changing time of year for some, the beginning of the academic year for others and a rollercoaster pollen season for allergy sufferers. If you have symptoms, get tested. Know that there are many treatment options and discuss your goals with your physician and allergist. We're here to help.

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