

## **Allergies Alert Staff and Children –parents too!**

### **As Ragweed Season Peaks, Keep Allergy Symptoms in Check**

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When dry weather conditions of late summer and autumn take hold, ragweed's profuse pollen is released into the air, accounting for 75 percent to 90 percent of all pollen found from August through October in some regions. Peak ragweed pollen counts tend to occur around Labor Day and can persist into late September or even mid-October.

"Since allergic rhinitis (also known as hay fever) can quickly develop into other complications, such as ear infections, sinusitis, recurrent sore throats, cough and headache, it's important that ragweed allergy is treated and well controlled. Studies show it also can cause altered sleep patterns, fatigue, irritability and poor school performance. Accurate allergy diagnosis and proper treatment can eliminate or alleviate most of these problems," said ACAAI President Jay M. Portnoy, M.D., chief, Section of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology at Children's Mercy Hospitals & Clinics in Kansas City, Mo.

Increasing amounts of ragweed pollen in the air can also trigger life-threatening asthma symptoms such as wheezing and difficulty breathing. Children with ragweed allergy are particularly at risk of developing asthma during peak pollen season. A three-year study of children with seasonal allergies found that one in five experienced asthma symptoms during pollen season, even though they had no previously reported history of asthma.

A single ragweed plant can produce up to 1 billion pollen grains. Since the pollen is light and becomes airborne with the gentlest of breezes, each grain can travel more than 100 miles from its source. The ACAAI offers the following tips to reduce exposure to pollen and control symptoms of allergic rhinitis and allergic asthma triggered by ragweed allergy.

- Friend or foe? If you have seasonal itchy, runny nose, sneezing, wheezing or watery eyes, allergy testing can determine whether or not you have ragweed allergy. An allergist can perform allergy tests, interpret them correctly and recommend avoidance tactics and treatment — such as medications and allergen immunotherapy (allergy shots) — that will help you enjoy life.
- Don't give pollen the time of day. Peak pollen emissions can vary from plant to plant. Ragweed pollen is released onto the plant leaves at daybreak, then depending upon the dew and wind conditions, it usually is at its highest airborne level between 10:00 a.m. and noon. This would be a good time to avoid outdoor activities. Also avoid windy weather.
- Knock knock, who's there? Keep pollen out by keeping windows closed in your home and car. Use a high efficiency disposable pleated media filter with a MERV rating of 8 to 12 in your home air conditioning system, and change it every three months. (A higher MERV means it is more effective in removing airborne allergens.) Change clothes after being outside and wash hair before bedtime. Avoid wearing contact lenses when outdoors to keep pollen from irritating the eyes. Be sure to wash your hands after petting furry animals that have been outside.
- Kissing cousins. Some people with ragweed pollen allergy also have an allergic reaction to certain foods including melons, bananas, cucumbers and zucchini. This cross-reaction is called oral allergy syndrome, which is itching or swelling of the lips, tongue, throat or roof of the mouth. Allergy testing may help identify foods that should be avoided.
- Mistaken identity. Goldenrod is often blamed for hay fever, since its bright yellow flower blooms at about the same time as ragweed. However, it produces heavy, sticky pollen grains that do not become airborne but instead are spread by insects, so it is not the cause of hay fever.

(Source: American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology)

