

Something to Sneeze About

Allergic reactions are caused by an overactive immune system response to a foreign substance such as pollen, dust, or molds. When this reaction affects the eyes or nose, it results in allergic rhinitis. Often, symptoms include sneezing, a runny nose, and itchy watery eyes. When an inflammation affects the bronchial tubes, it results in asthma. Typical symptoms include wheezing and shortness of breath.

Some individuals may have allergic reactions from the pollen of trees in the juniper family. These trees pollinate in the wintery months of December, January and February.

The Eastern red cedar (a member of the juniper family) is extremely invasive, and has become a problem throughout the state. Also, the mountain ashe juniper is common to the Arbuckle region of south-central Oklahoma. Ashe juniper pollinates from late December through January, and Eastern red cedar from late January through March. There are a few measures individuals can take, who suffer from juniper allergies.

First of all, wind direction and speed, dictate where and how far pollen will be carried. Researchers from the Aerobiology Lab at The University of Tulsa have been tracking pollen from the junipers since the late 90's. Research in the lab focuses on identifying the meteorological conditions that are associated with long distance transport. Generally, pollen is transported on days that are warm and sunny with southerly winds. Forecasts are developed to provide an alert for patients sensitive to mountain cedar pollen. Information from their website: <http://pollen.utulsa.edu/mcforecast.html> is extremely helpful in tracking 'high alert' pollen days. They are also interested in gathering information from individuals who suffer from cedar pollen allergic reactions in a short survey they provide.

A few other suggestions for reducing pollen contact during peak season, high pollen count days include staying indoors during peak hours, usually between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Also keeping your car windows closed when traveling, and showering after spending time outside to wash pollen that may collect on hair and skin.

For further information regarding eastern red cedar or ashe juniper, please call or come by the Murray County OSU Extension office. Office phone (580)622-3016.

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