

## HEALTH & SAFETY: SEASONAL ALLERGIES

*BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life.*

### Objectives

The reader will learn information on causes, prevention, and treatment of seasonal allergies.

### Definitions

**Allergy:** Overreaction of the body's immune system to substances that usually cause no reaction.

**Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis:** An allergy to airborne pollens, commonly referred to as hay fever.

**Immunotherapy:** Allergy shots in which small doses of substances causing allergies are injected under the skin.

**Antihistamines:** Substances that help block the action of histamine, a substance produced by our bodies during an allergic reaction.

**Histamine:** Substance that dilates blood vessel walls allowing fluids and gasses to pass through; plays a major role in many allergic reactions.

**Intranasal Corticosteroids:** Inhaled nasal sprays that treat seasonal and perennial (year-round) nasal allergy symptoms.

**Decongestants:** Fight nasal congestion by constricting blood vessels.

### Facts

- Seasonal allergies have been linked to a variety of common and serious chronic respiratory illnesses (such as sinusitis and asthma)
- Seasonal allergic rhinitis affects over 2.3 million Americans each year
- There is no cure for seasonal allergic rhinitis
- Seasonal allergies are caused from airborne pollens from trees, grasses, weeds, and spores from molds
- Pollen seasons vary by region of the United States
- Symptoms can include:
  - Watery eyes
  - Sneezing

- Clear, watery discharge from the nose
  - Headaches
  - Coughing and wheezing
  - Irritability
  - Depression
  - Loss of appetite
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Inflammation of inner eyelids and whites of eyes
  - Changes in behavior
- Symptoms may be treated with: antihistamines, intranasal corticosteroids, and decongestants.
  - Immunotherapy may be prescribed by an allergist, a doctor who specializes in treating allergies. Immunotherapy consists of a series of allergy shots that help prevent or decrease allergic reactions.

## Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Be especially alert for signs and symptoms of allergies in persons with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities who may not be able to easily communicate what they are feeling.
2. Consult with medical provider to determine cause and treatment strategies.
3. Take steps to prevent allergies:
  - Reduce exposure to allergens.
  - Keep windows and doors closed and air conditioning on at home and in the care during allergy season.
  - Avoid using attic and window fans that draw in outside air.
  - Run a dehumidifier to keep humidity low.
  - Stay indoors when possible and minimize outdoor activity during peak pollen periods.
  - Avoid mowing the lawn and raking leaves; avoid contact with freshly cut grass.
  - Shower or bathe and change clothing after outdoor activities.
  - Dry clothes in a vented dryer; do not hang clothes outside to dry.
  - Keep track of the pollen count in your area by visiting the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology web site: [www.aaaai.org/nab/index.cfm?p=pollen](http://www.aaaai.org/nab/index.cfm?p=pollen).

## Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. Seasonal rhinitis is more commonly referred to as:
  - A. Asthma
  - B. Sinusitis
  - C. Hay fever
  - D. Ragweed
2. Which of the following are symptoms of seasonal allergies?
  - A. Watery eyes, sneezing, clear water discharge from the nose
  - B. Headaches, coughing, wheezing
  - C. Depression, irritability, trouble sleeping
  - D. All of the above

3. True or False: Antihistamines cure seasonal allergies.
4. The best way to reduce symptoms of seasonal allergic rhinitis is to:
  - A. Keep windows and doors closed and air conditioning on in the home and in the car
  - B. Hang clothes outdoors to dry
  - C. A and B
  - D. None of the above

## References

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## Related Resources

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10584721](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10584721)  
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology: [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)  
WebMD Allergies Health Center: [www.webmd.com/allergies](http://www.webmd.com/allergies)

## Learning Assessment Answers

1. C
2. D
3. False
4. A

## Outreach Services

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As a service for persons supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, BQIS/ Outreach developed the Outreach Fact Sheet Library. The information provided is designed to enhance the understanding of the topic and does not replace other professional or medical instructions or individually developed plans. For more fact sheets and information, please visit [DDRSOutreach.IN.gov](http://DDRSOutreach.IN.gov).



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