

# THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

Andrew C. Engler, M.D.

290 Baldwin Avenue, San Mateo, California 94401

(650) 343-4597 FAX (650) 343- 3402

[www.theallergyclinic.com](http://www.theallergyclinic.com)

---

NEWSLETTER

June 2011

---

## Can "global warming" actually cause more allergies?

According to researchers who are monitoring this trend, it does! Pollen counts were at record levels last year and it was deemed one of the worst allergy seasons we have seen. With the heavy and sustained rain we have had to date, the unfortunate fact is that pollen counts appear to be even worse this year.

Researchers found that increased temperatures are causing the spring allergy season to come earlier in the year and last longer into the summer. Ten sites were monitored between Canada and across the United States from 1995 thru 2009. Daily temperatures were measured and then compared to corresponding pollen counts. The results showed that the higher the temperature, the higher the pollen count became. The explanation was that high temperatures produced more plant growth and more plant growth produced more pollen. Thus, higher temperatures and more rain have caused higher pollen counts which have resulted in an increase in allergies.

Their findings demonstrate a domino effect: The increase in carbon monoxide causes an increase in temperature which causes an increase in pollen which causes an increase in allergies. Even people who have never suffered allergies before are now suffering symptoms for the first time because pollen counts are steadily increasing to record levels. And many patients are finding that treatment that used to work quite well for them is no longer giving them adequate relief because their allergies have gotten worse. We're also seeing many patients who previously had only upper respiratory allergies who have now developed asthma.

If you or your loved one are experiencing miserable sneezy, stuffy, itchy symptoms that never seem to go away or if you are now getting symptoms you have never experienced before, you just may be starting to develop new or increased allergies to pollens. Fortunately, with proper allergy testing and treatment, we can usually reduce, if not eliminate, many of these symptoms to ensure a better quality of life. One very effective treatment, immunotherapy through shots or drops, makes most patients much less sensitive to the harmful effects of pollen.

If allergies are getting you down, please contact us to discuss what treatment options will best fit into your lifestyle and help you fight back against the rising pollen levels.

## We now have Penicillin allergy testing available at our clinic.

It is estimated that penicillin allergy is greatly overstated and a lot more people think they are allergic to penicillin than really are.

Approximately 85% of patients who describe themselves as penicillin allergic will have negative skin tests and can safely receive penicillin. PrePen is the only FDA approved skin test for the diagnosis of penicillin allergy and we are excited to offer this service to our patients.

Penicillin allergy testing not only benefits patients, but also physicians and other health care providers, as well as surrounding communities. These benefits include fighting resistant bacteria and offering less expensive treatments for patients. As many of you know, drug-resistant bacteria pose a major public health threat in today's world. Many patients thought to be allergic to penicillin are treated with very potent antibiotics which are often quite expensive. Continued use of these antibiotics may lead to increased drug-resistant bacteria, limited availability of alternative treatment for more severe infections, and greater side effect profiles.

How does one undergo Penicillin allergy testing? After obtaining your medical history, you and your healthcare provider will decide if you are a candidate to undergo this evaluation. Penicillin allergy testing is performed via skin tests and if the skin tests are essentially negative, an "oral challenge" to penicillin is performed. Negative test results using PrePen indicate a 97% confidence that the patient can be treated without the fear of a life threatening reaction if they are to take an antibiotic in the penicillin family. It is important to note that penicillin allergy testing may be contraindicated in those patients who have had a systemic reaction to penicillin. However, many patients with a history of penicillin allergy had a rash many years ago or were told when they were younger that they were allergic to penicillin but do not remember the details. Most of the time, these people are good candidates for penicillin allergy testing and will be found not to be allergic to this antibiotic—thus making treatment of future infections much safer and less expensive.

If you or someone you know would like to consider undergoing an allergy evaluation to penicillin, please contact our office and our staff will be happy to assist you.

## Does your mouth itch after you eat apples, melon or other fruits and veggies? You may have a common allergic condition known as The Oral Allergy Syndrome.

Many patients have remarked that they when they eat apples, melons or other fruits, within a few minutes they develop intense itching of their tongue, throat and roof of their mouth. It turns out that many patients with seasonal allergies experience itching of the oral cavity after eating certain foods that share common proteins with pollens. This condition is called The Oral Allergy Syndrome and has been found to be quite common in those allergic to birch tree pollen (spring pollen), grass (summer pollen), and ragweed (fall pollen). Patients with tree pollen allergy often have oral itching after eating apples, pears, peaches, kiwi, celery, and parsley. Patients allergic to grass may react to kiwi, peach, celery, melon and tomato. Finally, ragweed-sensitive patients may have these same oral symptoms after eating bananas and watermelon. The allergic reaction to these foods can occur any time of the year when eating them but tends to be worse during the pollen season, especially if your typical allergy symptoms are very troublesome. Importantly, heating most of these foods at high temperature often reduces or eliminates the allergenic proteins, so the patient may be able to tolerate cooked fruits and veggies (although for me, cooked watermelon is not a culinary delight).

Interestingly, many patients who receive immunotherapy for their pollen allergies, with either allergy injections or sublingual drops, find that their oral allergy symptoms also improve. While it's not recommended that you take allergy shots so you can eat apples without having your mouth itch, this phenomena is a good example of how allergic cross reactions work and of the benefits of getting your underlying allergies under optimum control.

If you've noticed adverse symptoms in response to fruits, vegetables or other foods, refrain from eating them and check with us about the safety of eating them in the future. In addition, If you are concerned about a food allergy or sensitivity, please contact our office so we can arrange appropriate testing to help you sort this out and develop a game plan designed to keep food allergies from causing irritating symptoms, making you sick and/or disrupting your life.