

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Man's Best Friend? Not during Hay Fever Season: New Medical Study Suggests Allergy to Dogs (and Cats and Dust Mites) Worsens Pollen's Impact

The spring and fall allergy seasons can be even more miserable for those with dog, cat or dust mite allergies, according to new research. These year-round allergies appear to "pre-prime" the immune system so symptoms hit harder, according to a study recently published in the *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology*, the scientific journal of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), of which Dr. Engler is a Scientific Fellow.

In California, hay fever (known as seasonal allergic rhinitis) hits hardest in the spring and fall, when pollen counts are highest. The typical symptoms – sneezing, itching, stuffy nose and watery eyes – can make sufferers miserable. Hay fever sufferers who also are allergic to cats, dogs or dust mites develop symptoms faster and more severely, the research suggests. Treating the cat, dog or dust mite allergy year round can help make the hay fever more manageable.

"People with hay fever react differently when ragweed allergy season arrives. Some start sneezing right away and others don't, so we wanted to determine what makes certain people develop symptoms more quickly," said allergist Anne K. Ellis, MD, lead author of the study. "We tested a number of common perennial allergens and found that having an allergy to cats, dogs or dust mites sets hay fever sufferers up for faster onset of symptoms when exposed to ragweed."

The study included 123 people allergic to ragweed. Of those, 66 percent tested positive for cat allergies, 63 percent tested positive for dog allergies and 73 percent tested positive for dust mite

allergies. All were exposed to ragweed for three hours in a special controlled room called the Environmental Exposure Unit, and completed symptom questionnaires every 30 minutes during exposure.

"On average, those who tested positive for cat, dog or dust mite allergies developed symptoms either faster than, or to a greater degree than those who tested negative for those allergies," said Dr. Ellis. To avoid the more intense early reaction, people with cat, dog and dust mite allergies should try to limit their exposure to those allergens before ragweed season starts, said Dr. Ellis. Because that often is not practical when it comes to family pets, an alternative is to treat their cat, dog or dust-mite allergies, she said.

"Allergy immunizations (aka immunotherapy which can be taken as allergy injections or sublingual allergy drops) can provide hay fever relief to those sufferers who have ongoing symptoms from cats, dogs or dust mites, even if they think the symptoms are mild and easily tolerated," said Neil Kao, MD, chair of the ACAAI Rhinitis/Sinusitis Committee. "They'll likely find ragweed allergy season easier to endure if they're treating their perennial (year round) allergies."

This year, 2010, has been one of the worst years for allergies sufferers this decade. Unfortunately, global warming and the changing weather have produced massive pollen levels and many patients have been miserable. This new study reinforces the need for those with allergies to get a comprehensive allergy evaluation and take appropriate steps to make sure that their underlying allergies are properly diagnosed and kept under the best possible control.

As we move into the fall season, now's the time to make sure that your allergy prescriptions are up to date and that you're ready for what the environment throws at you. If you've gotten behind

on your immunotherapy regimen, please contact our office and we'll do our best to get you back on track asap.

Flu Vaccine Update

With flu season just around the corner, it is time for you and your family to prepare. People with asthma and other chronic health conditions should receive their flu shot this fall. The flu season normally ranges from November through March. Peak months are generally December, January and February. Flu infections can cause a severe asthma attack, which can lead to potential complications including pneumonia and hospitalization to treat the exacerbation of asthma. Influenza is caused by a virus, therefore antibiotics like penicillin will not cure it.

The best way to treat the flu is to prevent it by getting a flu shot each fall in late October or November, before the flu season begins. It generally takes two weeks to develop protective immunity from the flu shot. This year the flu shot already includes the H1N1 vaccination, so a separate vaccination for H1N1 is not necessary. Although our office is not offering the flu shot, we highly recommend receiving the vaccination at your primary care physician's (PCP) office. If your PCP does not have flu vaccines or if you do not have a PCP, we have a list of locations in San Mateo which are providing flu vaccinations. For those patients with egg allergy who need a flu vaccination, the American Academy of Allergy has published a protocol we have successfully used that allows us to skin test you to the flu vaccine to determine whether it is safe for you to receive this treatment. Most patients with egg allergy can safely receive the flu vaccination after undergoing this testing. If you have any questions about this or any other allergy related matter, please contact our office. We are here to help you feel better and stay well.