



Asthma, allergy and spring

Spring brings warmer weather and longer days.

For many people with asthma and allergies, it also means increased exposure to allergens such as pollen, mould, dust mites and animal dander. These allergens can worsen hay fever and make asthma harder to control.

What are allergies and how can they affect asthma?

An allergy occurs when the immune system reacts to a usually harmless substance (an allergen). This reaction causes inflammation in different parts of the body including:

- Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) which affects the nose and eyes
- Skin reactions such as eczema or hives
- Asthma which affects the lungs
- Anaphylaxis, a severe, whole body allergic reaction

When a sensitive person breathes in or comes into contact with an allergen the airways can become inflamed, swollen and tight, with increased mucus production. This can trigger asthma symptoms or a flare-up.

Allergic reactions vary from mild to severe. If you think someone is having a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), call 000 immediately and ask for an ambulance.

Common allergy symptoms

If you have allergies, you may notice:

- A runny, blocked or itchy nose
- Sneezing
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Skin rashes or hives
- Worsening asthma symptoms (cough, wheeze, breathlessness or chest tightness)

Around 80% of people with asthma also have allergies, and may find their symptoms worse at certain times of year, especially in spring.



Common spring triggers and how to reduce exposure

Pollen - Grass, tree and weed pollens are common triggers. Wind pollinated plants are more likely to cause symptoms. To reduce pollen exposure:

- Stay indoors on high pollen, very windy days or after thunderstorms
- Keep windows and doors closed on windy days or when mowing the lawn
- Shower or change clothes after being outdoors
- Dry clothes indoors to stop pollen settling on them
- Choose low pollen or non-wind pollinated plants for your garden
- Keep on top of weeds before they flower or go to seed
- Monitor local pollen forecasts

Dust mites - Present year-round and thrive in warm, humid environments. To reduce exposure:

- Wash bed linen weekly in hot water above 55°C
- Use dust mite resistant covers on mattresses, pillows and doonas

- Remove soft toys from beds and wash them regularly
- Vacuum weekly, ideally with a HEPA filter
- Wipe dusty surfaces with a damp microfibre cloth
- Remove sheepskins and woollen underlays if possible

Mould - Grows in damp, poorly ventilated areas. To reduce mould:

- Improve ventilation
- Fix water leaks and plumbing problems
- Clean gutters and vents
- Dry wet areas quickly
- Be aware of sources e.g. indoor plants, fish tanks, garden mulch and compost heaps

Animal dander - Allergens come from skin flakes, saliva and urine, not just fur. If you have a pet:

- Keep pets out of bedrooms
- Wash pets, their bedding and toys regularly
- Wash your hands and face after touching pets
- Vacuum carpets and upholstery regularly

What is thunderstorm asthma?

Thunderstorm asthma can happen when high grass pollen levels combine with certain storm conditions. Strong winds lift pollen into the air, where it breaks into tiny particles that can be breathed deep into the lungs. This can cause sudden and severe asthma symptoms, even in people who have only had hay fever before.

You may be at higher risk if you have:

- Seasonal asthma and/or hay fever
- Poorly controlled asthma
- A history of asthma
- Undiagnosed asthma

Spring is peak season, but risk can continue into early summer.



What to do if allergies are worsening your asthma

- Avoid known triggers where possible
- Treat hay fever, as untreated symptoms can worsen asthma
- Follow your Asthma Action Plan
- If you have asthma and food allergies, ensure you know how to manage anaphylaxis

See your doctor if symptoms are increasing, frequent or interfering with daily life.

Tips for staying well

- Take your preventer medicine daily or as prescribed

- Carry your reliever with you
- Make sure medicines are in date
- See your doctor if symptoms worsen or become more frequent
- Monitor pollen forecasts and thunderstorm warnings
- Keep your Asthma Action Plan is up to date
- Know Asthma First Aid

With the right treatment and support, most people can manage their asthma and allergies well and reduce the risk of flare-ups during spring.

Sources:

1. Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy. *Asthma and Allergy - Fast Facts*. 2023.
2. Asthma Australia. *Thunderstorm Asthma*. 2025.
3. HealthDirect Australia. *Thunderstorm Asthma*. 2026.

How we can help

Respiratory Care WA has a team of respiratory healthcare professionals here to provide information and support for Western Australians living with asthma and COPD. We offer in-person education and support at our respiratory hubs or via telehealth. Our team can also visit schools, workplaces or community and sporting groups to deliver free asthma management sessions.

Email ask@respiratorycarewa.org.au to find out more.