Welcome to allergy season. Here's how to protect yourself

By Kenya Hunter
AP Health Writer

ATLANTA — Allergy season can be miserable for tens of millions of Americans when trees, grass, and other pollens cause runny noses, itchy eyes, coughing and sneezing.

Where you live, what you're allergic to and your lifestyle can make a big difference when it comes to the severity of your allergies. Experts say climate change is leading to longer and more intense allergy seasons, but also point out that treatments for seasonal allergies have become more effective over the last decade.

Here are some tips from experts to keep allergy symptoms at bay — maybe even enough to allow you to enjoy the outdoors.

NEW CITIES TOP THE LIST OF 'ALLERGY CAPITALS'

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America issues an annual ranking of the most challenging cities to live in if you have allergies, based on over-the-counter medicine use, pollen counts and the number of available allergy specialists.

This year, the top five cities are: Boise, Idaho; San Diego; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Provo, Utah; and Rochester, New York.

Pollen helps plants reproduce — and makes us miserable

Pollen is the powdery substance made by seed-producing plants and trees that is part of their reproductive process. Earlier in the spring, tree pollen is the main culprit. After that grasses pollinate, followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall.

Some of the most common tree pollens that cause allergies include birch, cedar, cottonwood, maple, elm, oak and walnut, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Grasses that cause symptoms include Bermuda, Johnson, rye and Kentucky bluegrass.

HERE'S HOW TO TRACK POLLEN LEVELS

Pollen trackers can help you decide when to go outside. The American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology tracks levels through a network of counting stations across the U.S. Counts are available at its website and via email.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO TRY TO AVOID POLLEN ALTOGETHER

The best and first step to controlling allergies is avoiding exposure. Keep the windows in your car and your home closed, even when it's nice outside.

If you go outside, wearing long sleeves can keep pollen off your skin to help ward off allergic reactions, said Dr. James Baker, an allergist at the University of Michigan. It also provides some sun protection, he added.

When you get home, change your clothes and shower daily to ensure all the pollen is off of you — including your hair. If you can't wash your hair every day, try covering it when you go outside with a hat or scarf. Don't get in the bed with your outside clothes on, because the pollen will follow.

It's also useful to rinse your eyes and nose with saline to remove any pollen, experts said. And the same masks that got us through the pandemic can protect you from allergies — though they won't help with eye symptoms.

HOW TO RELIEVE ALLERGY SYMPTOMS

Over-the-counter nasal sprays are among the most effective treatments for seasonal allergies, experts said.

But patients often use them incorrectly, irritating parts of the nose, said Dr. Kathleen May, an allergist at Augusta University in Georgia. She suggested angling the nozzle outward toward your ear rather than sticking it straight up your nose.

Over-the-counter allergy pills like Claritin, Allegra and Zyrtec are helpful, but may not be as effective as quickly since they're taken by mouth, experts said.

If your allergy symptoms are impacting your quality of life, like causing you to lose sleep or loose focus at work or school, it might be time to consider making an appointment with an allergist. There are medications that can train you immune system not to overreact to allergens.

Some remedies for allergy relief that have been circulating on social media or suggested by celebrities — like incorporating local honey into your diet to expose yourself to pollen — have been debunked.

Dr. Shyam Joshi, an allergist at Oregon Health and Science University, said that's because the flowers that bees pollinate typically don't contain the airborne pollen that causes allergy symptoms.

IS ALLERGY SEASON CHANGING?

Winters are milder and growing seasons are longer as the climate is changing, meaning there's more opportunity for pollen to stay in the air, resulting in longer and more severe allergy seasons.

Last year was one of the most intense allergy seasons on record, particularly in the Southeast U.S.

As demand for GLP-1 pills and shots surges, healthy habits are still key

By Jonel Aleccia
AP Health Writer

Whether they're using weekly shots or daily pills, more Americans than ever are turning to anti-obesity drugs to lose weight and boost health.

About 1 in 8 U.S. adults say they are taking a GLP-1 drug, according to a recent survey by the health research group KFF.

Just since January, more than 600,000 prescriptions have been written for Novo Nordisk's new Wegovy pill, the company said. Early analysis suggests that more than a third of users are new to the drugs, according to Truveta, a health care data company.

But medication alone isn't the answer, experts caution. It also takes lifestyle changes — healthy diet, exercise, adequate sleep and stress management — to reap the biggest benefits from the drugs known as GLP-1s.

"The biggest mistake people make with GLP-1 medications is thinking the prescription is the treatment," said Dr. Katherine Saunders, an obesity medicine expert at Weill Cornell Medicine and co-founder of FlyteHealth, a weight-loss treatment company.

GLP-1s can spur weight loss and health benefits on their own, but the effects are larger and last longer when the drugs are combined with lifestyle changes, a recent review of nearly three dozen studies found.

Here's what experts say you should know about GLP-1 drugs and healthy habits:

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT WEIGHT

Obesity is a big driver of chronic disease, including conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. But the focus should be overall health and not just the numbers on a scale, said Dr. Jody Dushay, an endocrinologist and obesity expert at Harvard Medical School.

"Health is what you eat, how much you move your body, what is your blood sugar, what is your blood pressure, what is your cholesterol," she said. "All of those things are really important."

The GLP-1 drugs work by targeting hormones in the gut and brain that slow digestion and target appetite and feelings of fullness. That effect "levels the playing field," said Saunders, making it easier to adopt healthy habits like eating less and moving more.

"Social media and advertising sometimes create the impression that these medications are a quick fix, but obesity is a complex, chronic, progressive disease" that requires ongoing medical management, she added.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SHOW ABOUT GLP-1S AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES?

The clinical trials of anti-obesity medications like Wegovy and Zepbound included structured lifestyle programs along with the medication, which are advised along with every new prescription.

That results not only in significant weight loss, but improved health markers.

A February study of more than 98,000 U.S. military veterans found that those who used a GLP-1 and adhered to six to eight healthy habits had a 43% lower risk of serious cardiovascular events such as stroke and heart attack than those who didn't use the drugs and followed three or fewer such habits.

Lifestyle habits "can substantially amplify the benefits of modern medications" noted Dr. Frank Hu, a lead author and chair of the nutrition department at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

WELLNESS CALENDAR

Childhood Immunization Clinic — Thursday, April 2, 16, and 30, 1003 Gilbert Street, by appointment only. Immunization clinics at the Public Health Office are for children up to the age of 18 that have Medicaid (T19), that are under-insured (insurance doesn't cover immunization) or have NO insurance. You MUST call to set up an appointment, (641-257-6111) please call in-advance as clinic does fill up. If you do not have T19, we will ask for a $19 donation fee for each shot.

Alzheimer's Support Group — Thursday, April 16, 3 p.m at Apple Valley Place. 801 Blunt Parkway, Charles City, IA. The support group is aimed for family members and caregivers of those affected by Alzheimer's disease. The group is held the third Thursday of every month.

Ostomy Support Group — First Wednesday of the month. 6 p.m. in the FCMC Veteran's Room. For more information, call Lynee Wilkens, RN CWON, at 641-257-4353.

Childbirth Education Classes — For more information or to register for a class, call the Birth Center at Floyd County Medical Center at 228-6830, ext. 2700.

Parkinson Support Group — For information call St. John Lutheran Church, Charles City, 1-641-228-3397.

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2025 WATER QUALITY REPORT FOR CHARLES CITY WATER SUPPLY

This report contains important information regarding the water quality in our water system. The source of our water is groundwater. Our water quality testing shows the following results:

CONTAMINANT	MCL - (MCLG)	Compliance		Date	Violation	Source
		Type	Value & (Range)		Yes/No	
Total Haloacetic Acids (ppb) [HAA5]	60 (N/A)	LRAA	9.00 (9 - 9)	09/30/2025	No	By-products of drinking water disinfection
Lead (ppb)	AL=15 (0)	90th	6.20 (ND - 14)	2025	No	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; erosion of natural deposits
Copper (ppm)	AL=1.3 (1.3)	90th	0.0997 (0.0019 - 0.155)	2025	No	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; Erosion of natural deposits; Leaching from wood preservatives
950 - DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM						
Chlorine (ppm)	MRDL=4.0 (MRDLG=4.0)	RAA	1.9 (1.24 - 2.2)	12/31/2025	No	Water additive used to control microbes
Nitrite [as N] (ppm)	1 (1)	SGL	0.110	2025	No	Runoff from fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks, sewage; Erosion of natural deposits
04 - S/EP WELLS 5,7,8 @ PLANT (TREATED)						
Fluoride (ppm)	4 (4)	SGL	0.5	01/05/2022	No	Water additive which promotes strong teeth; Erosion of natural deposits; Discharge from fertilizer and aluminum factories. **The City of Charles City does not add fluoride to drinking water.**
Barium (ppm)	2 (2)	SGL	0.062	01/05/2022	No	Discharge of drilling wastes; Discharge from metal refineries; Erosion of natural deposits
Sodium (ppm)	N/A (N/A)	SGL	5.21	01/09/2025	No	Erosion of natural deposits; Added to water during treatment process
Combined Radium	5 (N/A)	SGL	<1.0 pCi/L	04/06/2021	No	Erosion of natural deposits
Volatile Organic Compounds	0.2 - 700 (ND - 700)	SGL	<0.50 ug/L	01/29/2024	No	Runoff from industrial sites, herbicides, petroleum sites, insecticides, and PVC factories
2, 4-D (mg/L)	0.07 (0.07)	SGL	<0.002 mg/L	01/23/2024	No	Runoff from industrial sites, herbicides, petroleum sites, insecticides, and PVC factories
PFOA (ppt)	4 (0)	SGL	ND	06/01/2024	No	Discharge from manufacturing and industrial chemical facilities, use of certain consumer products, occupational exposures, and certain fire fighting activities
PFOS (ppt)	4 (0)	SGL	ND	06/01/2024	No	Discharge from manufacturing and industrial chemical facilities, use of certain consumer products, occupational exposures, and certain fire fighting activities
PFHxS (ppt)	10 (10)	SGL	ND	06/01/2024	No	Discharge from manufacturing and industrial chemical facilities, use of certain consumer products, occupational exposures, and certain fire fighting activities
PFNA (ppt)	10 (10)	SGL	ND	06/01/2024	No	Discharge from manufacturing and industrial chemical facilities, use of certain consumer products, occupational exposures, and certain fire fighting activities
HFPO-DA (ppt)	10 (10)	SGL	ND	06/012024	No	Discharge from manufacturing and industrial chemical facilities, use of certain consumer products, occupational exposures, and certain fire fighting activities

Note: Contaminants with dates indicate results from the most recent testing done in accordance with regulations.

DEFINITIONS

- Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) – The highest level of a contaminant that is allowed in drinking water. MCLs are set as close to the MCLGs as feasible using the best available treatment technology.
- Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) -- The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MCLGs allow for a margin of safety.
- ppb -- parts per billion.
- ppm -- parts per million.
- pCi/L – picocuries per liter
- N/A – Not applicable
- ND -- Not detected
- RAA – Running Annual Average
- Treatment Technique (TT) – A required process intended to reduce the level of a contaminant in drinking water.
- Action Level (AL) – The concentration of a contaminant which, if exceeded, triggers treatment or other requirements which a water system must follow.
- Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level Goal (MRDLG) - The level of a drinking water disinfectant below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MRDLGs do not reflect the benefits of the use of disinfectants to control microbial contaminants.
- Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level (MRDL) - The highest level of a disinfectant allowed in drinking water. There is convincing evidence that addition of a disinfectant is necessary for control of microbial contaminants.
- SGL – Single Sample Result
- RTCR – Revised Total Coliform Rule
- NTU – Nephelometric Turbidity Units

GENERAL INFORMATION

Drinking water, including bottled water, may reasonably be expected to contain at least small amounts of some contaminants. The presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that water posed a health risk. More information about contaminants or potential health effects can be obtained by calling the Environmental Protection Agency's Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

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Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. Immuno-compromised persons such as persons with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, persons who have undergone organ transplants, people with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly, and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. EPA/CDC guidelines on appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection by Cryptosporidium and other microbial contaminants are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

Lead can cause serious health effects in people of all ages, especially pregnant people, infants (both formula-fed and breastfed), and young children. Lead in drinking water is primarily from materials and parts used in service lines and in home plumbing. Our water supply is responsible for providing high quality drinking water and removing lead pipes but cannot control the variety of materials used in the plumbing in your home. Because lead levels may vary over time, lead exposure is possible even when your tap sampling results do not detect lead at one point in time. You can help protect yourself and your family by identifying and removing lead materials within your home plumbing and taking steps to reduce your family's risk. Using a filter, certified by an American National Standards Institute accredited certifier to reduce lead, is effective in reducing lead exposures. Follow the instructions provided with the filter to ensure the filter is used properly. Use only cold water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Boiling water does not remove lead from water. Before using tap water for drinking, cooking, or making baby formulas, flush your pipes for several minutes. You can do this by running your tap, taking a shower, doing laundry or a load of dishes. If you have a lead service line or galvanized requiring replacement service line, you may need to flush your pipes for a longer period. If you are concerned about lead in your water and wish to have your water tested, contact CHARLES CITY WATER SUPPLY at 641-257-6315. Information on lead in drinking water, testing methods, and steps you can take to minimize exposure is available at https://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead.

Our water supply has completed a service line inventory. The most up to date inventory can be accessed online at:https://charlescitygis.integritygis.com/H5/Index.html?viewer=charlescity# If the icon on your house/business is white, please contact us with a time that works for us to gain access to the basement so that we can update your service line material. There is no charge for this.

SOURCE WATER ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

This water supply obtains its water from the dolomite and limestone of the Devonian aquifer. The Devonian aquifer was determined to be highly susceptible to contamination because the characteristics of the aquifer and overlying materials provide little protection from contamination at the land surface. The Devonian wells will be highly susceptible to surface contaminants such as leaking underground storage tanks, contaminant spills, and excess fertilizer application. A detailed evaluation of your source water was completed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and is available from the Water Department at 641-257-6315.

OTHER INFORMATION

Decisions pertaining to the public water supply are made at City Council meetings held on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month at 6:00 p.m. in the council chambers at City Hall; these meetings are open to the public.

For more information on meeting minutes and the City's Water Department, please visit the City's website at: http://www.cityofcharlescity.org

You may pick up a printed copy of the Consumer Confidence Report at any of the following locations during normal working hours:

CITY HALL BUSINESS OFFICE: 900 Clark St. 641-257-6300

CHARLES CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY: 910 Clark St. 641-257-6319

CHARLES CITY WATER DEPARTMENT: 1709 INDIANA AVE. 641-257-6315

This Consumer Confidence Report, as well as previous reports, may be viewed and downloaded at: https://www.cityofcharlescity.org/Archive.aspx?AMID=36

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this information or any other questions regarding the water system, please contact the Charles City Water Department at 641-257-6315 during regular working hours of 7:00 am to 3:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

Or email: cory@cityofcharlescity.org with any questions or concerns.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS REPORT WILL NOT BE MAILED TO INDIVIDUAL CUSTOMERS

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