

# Asthma, Hay fever and the ACT Pollen Season

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The purpose of this fact sheet is to advise individuals about pollen allergies and how affected community members can reduce their symptoms during the ACT pollen season.

## ***When is pollen season in the ACT?***

Pollen from grasses, weeds or trees can trigger symptoms of allergic rhinitis (commonly known as hay fever) and asthma. While grass pollens are highest in spring, the pollen season can last for several months in our region, starting as early as July and extending through to February.

Grass pollen season also coincides with increased thunderstorm activity. Epidemic thunderstorm asthma is where a large number of people develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time. This is thought to be triggered by a unique combination of high pollen levels and a certain type of thunderstorm. People with asthma and hay fever are at risk of asthma symptoms – sometimes severe – during these events.

Thunderstorm asthma events are uncommon and don't occur every year, but when they do, they happen during the grass pollen season from October through to December in south-east Australia.

Further information on thunderstorm asthma is available on the Better Health Channel website:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/thunderstorm-asthma>

## ***Pollen allergy causes hay fever***

The ACT has the highest rate of hay fever in Australia – affecting 1 in 4 residents.

Hay fever is an allergic reaction to allergens, like pollen, breathed in through the nose – this causes an immune response in the lining of the nose where the nasal passages become red, swollen and sensitive.

Common symptoms of hay fever include:

- Runny, itchy, congested nose;
- Irritable, itchy, watery and red eyes; and
- Itchy ears, throat and palate.

## ***Pollen can trigger asthma***

Asthma is a long-term lung condition; 1 in 9 Canberrans are affected. People with asthma have sensitive airways in their lungs that react to triggers, including pollen, causing a 'flare-up.'

Common symptoms of asthma include:

- Breathlessness;
- Wheezing;
- Tight feeling in the chest; and
- Continuing cough.

An asthma flare-up can come on slowly (over hours, days or even weeks) or very quickly (over minutes). Further information on asthma is available on the Asthma Australia website: <https://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au/nsw/home>

## ***What can I do to reduce symptoms this pollen season?***

As grass pollen season approaches, here are some things you can do to prepare:

- **If you have asthma** – always carry your blue reliever puffer with you and follow a written asthma action plan to be able to respond to a flare up of symptoms from a range of potential causes;
- **If you have hay fever** – see your pharmacist or doctor for a hay fever treatment plan, and
- **If you have hay fever, and especially if you experience wheezing and coughing with your hay fever**, it is important to make sure you don't also have asthma. Speak to your doctor about whether or not you might have asthma.

You can also access resources to monitor pollen levels in the ACT:

- Download the [AirRater App](#) for real-time, geographically specific information on pollen and air quality in the ACT; and
- Monitor the [Canberra Pollen Count and Forecast Website](#) daily.

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