

## Feeling stuffed up?

### Ragweed season at its peak: Rainy summer, ban on pesticides factors in making this a bad year for allergy sufferers, experts say

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Seasonal allergy sufferers who find themselves sniffing, sneezing and coughing more than in past years may be able to blame the rainy summer and provincial pesticide ban for their heightened sickly symptoms.

This is the peak of ragweed season, allergists say. Ragweed is generally pollinating between Aug. 15 and the first frost, usually around mid-October.

Commonly found throughout Ontario, ragweed is highly allergenic and widely considered by allergists as the prime cause of hay fever in North America.

Feeling the effects yesterday was 12-year-old Bailey Near, who was in the allergy remedy aisle at the drug store to pick up some medication with her mom, Kerri.

“Oh yeah, my allergies are really bad this year,” she said. “I’m all stuffed up right now.”

Kerri said she’s heard a similar story from friends and co-workers who have hay fever.

“Everyone I work with has sinus problems right now,” she said. “This has been a really bad year for Bailey.”

And Bailey isn’t alone. According to the pollen index on the Weather Network’s website, the pollen count in the area is moderate to high.

Shoppers Drug Mart pharmacist Zebrina Kassam says she’s noticed a spike in people looking for relief this season.

“I’ve definitely seen a lot more people than usual coming in and complaining of allergy related symptoms,” she said. “I think people are experiencing the kind of symptoms they normally experience at this time of year, but perhaps more magnified.

“And I’m starting to see people who have never had allergies before coming in complaining to have symptoms similar to seasonal allergy symptoms. You can develop allergies.”

Erin Bell, a local holistic allergist at Bios Natural Health Allergy and Nutrition Clinic in Brookdale Plaza on Chemong Rd., said the wet and stormy weather this summer combined with the cooler temperatures has likely kept pollen levels high.

“Every time we have a storm or rain shower, all the pollen is pushed around and even increased,” she said. “When it gets cooler, wetter and windier, the pollens are blown through the air more.”

At her clinic, Bell tests foods, environmental allergens, toxic substances, moulds, pollens and looks for ways to naturally alleviate people’s symptoms through diet and lifestyle, she said.

“When your immune system is functioning optimally, people have a better chance of withstanding the effects when they come in contact with allergens,” she said. “Most people are immune deficient and nutrient deficient.”

Dr. Anne Ellis, an assistant professor of allergy and immunology in the department of medicine at Queen’s University in Kingston, said she’s felt the affects of her own ragweed allergy.

“I do find this year is a little worse for me,” she said. “People seem to be complaining more this year, but it hasn’t been formally studied.”

On April 22, the ban on cosmetic pesticide use came into effect in Ontario.

While intended to safeguard the environment and citizens, experts say the ban could be responsible for more environmental allergens, such as grass, ragweed and goldenrod

"I can certainly attest to the growth of the ragweed plants in my own backyard," Ellis said. "They're definitely robust and hearty."

Although there are no studies to say conclusively that the pesticide ban is contributing to heightened allergy symptoms, Ellis said more weeds would logically result in more pollen.

"Is there more ragweed around this year because we've had so much rain? And is there more ragweed because we've had a pesticide ban? It certainly would make sense.

"If you've had a good growing season in general, then one would expect that everything would grow just as well, ragweed included."

Deciding which allergy medication to buy is a personal choice, Kassam said, because everyone is affected by different allergens.

"Everybody's different, so the most important thing to do is come in and speak to the pharmacist about what allergy medication is the best for them," she said.

"It also depends on what other medications they take, what sensitivities they have, what other allergies they may have, such as food products or medication allergies."

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#### Allergy tips

Don't let seasonal allergies keep you indoors until the first frost. Some tips to alleviate the symptoms:

- Dry sheets and clothes in the dryer instead of on the line outside where they can collect pollen.
- Use air conditioning, which cleans, cools and dries the air. This helps remove pollen from indoor air.
- Have someone else mow the lawn or rake the leaves, which stirs up pollen and moulds.
- Take a shower before bed to wash pollen from your hair and body and prevent pollen from settling on your pillow.
- Consider staying indoors when pollen or mould counts are high. Pollen counts tend to peak between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Rain and cool morning temperatures slow release of pollen.
- Speak to a pharmacist to find the right the allergy remedy.

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