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Pollen packing punch in Myrtle Beach area Oddly, Mother Nature's yellow stuff isn't what's in our noses

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Pollen is putting it down.

Seemingly overnight, the fine, dustlike particles that ride on the wind have become omnipresent on the Grand Strand. Like tiny tumbleweeds, they whirl and twirl in the breeze. Like paint, they cover our vehicles with yellowish-green mist.

It is the reason for our itchy eyes, runny noses and sneezes.

And like that houseguest that visits in the summer and won't leave, pollen isn't going anywhere soon.

"Up North, pollen season is usually over by October," said Dr. Mark Schecker of Coastal Carolina Allergy & Asthma Associates in Myrtle Beach.

"Here, it can last until December. That's why people tend to have more problems here because the pollen season lasts longer. About 80 percent of the year here, you are getting pollen."

Typically, tree pollen starts in mid-February and keeps going strong until mid-April. All the while, grass pollen season is already on the scene by mid-April and usually hangs around until late June. Then, weed pollen season shows up around Aug. 15 and sticks around until the weather turns cold again.

"That's not very kind of Mother Nature, is it?" Schecker said. "That is a lot of time."

Pollen is especially mobile on windy days.

"Pollen can travel 50 miles from where it is released, even 100 miles from where it is released," Schecker said.

"You can run, but you can't hide."

Yes, pollen is here and causing problems, thanks to nature's way of saying it is making love and lots of it.

Much of the pollen you see comes from pine trees.

"On Saturday, there were pine pollen clouds blowing all over the place," Schecker said.

Although maligned, especially by those who take pride in shiny cars, pollen from pine trees is not what's clogging respiratory tracts.

"Pine pollen doesn't cause a lot of problems because it's too big to stay airborne long enough to cause problems," Schecker said. "However, the pollen from oak, elm, hickory, pecan and sycamore trees is invisible and very light.

"It floats in the air and gets into your eyes," he said. "People see pine trees and think that is what is making them sick, but it is what they don't see that's hurting them."

Some people with allergies tend to have colds that last for weeks, ear and nose infections, watery eyes, coughing and breathing difficulties.

Hidden allergy problems can even affect the way you sleep, your energy and mental alertness, Schecker said.

"You feel exhausted, can't concentrate and have problems being productive at work," he said. "Many people will say this time of year they feel whipped. They just don't have any energy."

Walter McCloud, who works at American Carwash in Myrtle Beach, said pollen's presence certainly can't be denied.

"I live on the third floor of my building and I can look down on certain buildings and see all the yellow," McCloud said.

"The pollen just keeps falling. It gets in my eyes and causes them to itch."

To get some relief, McCloud keeps his windows closed when at home and limits his time outside when possible, which isn't often.

"I try to breathe less," McCloud said.

People sensitive to tree pollens suffer greatly on windy days and often hope for the wet stuff.

"They can't wait for the rain so it will wash the pollen away," Schecker said.

The backlash comes soon afterwards, though, because the rain stimulates growth and when it dries, the pollen gets worse, the doctor said.

Some allergy sufferers resort to over-the-counter medications.

Schecker said the nonprescription medicines, which maintain their prescription strength, work pretty well but are not powerful enough for those with more severe problems.

Such folks need preventive treatments, instead of waiting to take medication once they have issues.

Courtney Scirocco used to have issues.

The 11-year-old, who has been getting allergy shots for two years at Coastal Carolina Allergy & Asthma Associates, found out that grass, among other culprits, caused her discomfort. .

"She would play in the grass, and she would get hives all over her," said her mom, Jeneen Scirocco, as she waited for Courtney to get two shots. "She would be playing with the dog and have an allergy fit."

Courtney can now roll in the grass and play with Ralphie, the family dog , with no problems.

Schecker said people with pets should be aware that they can be a hidden source of pollen because the pollen gets into their coats and then the pets bring it into the homes. Washing them regularly helps.

Schecker said antihistamines can work for the itchiness suffered via noses, eyes or mouth, and are available over-the-counter.

Nasal steroids, which are prescription only, does the work of antihistamines, as well as combat nasal congestion and post-nasal drip.

Other people love nasal saline rinses, but Schecker said they aren't as effective.

Vaccinations, like the ones Courtney receives, can actually help some people get rid of their allergies, Schecker said.

But there are some symptoms even medical science can't address..

Your car will have to stay dusty with that yellow-green stuff.

"You can wipe off a section of your car and look again and the pollen is back on there," said MacGregory Chestnut of MacGregory's Auto Detailing. . "You can get a gun, get a knife or try to stick it with a fork, that pollen ain't going anywhere. It's going to be there."

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