



News Release

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CONTACT: Hope Caperton, hcaperto@ttuhsc.edu
(806) 743-2143

Texas Tech Physicians Allergist Sheds Light On Adult-Onset Allergies

With the spring season in full swing, allergy symptoms can cause discomfort for many people. James Tarbox, M.D., an allergist at Texas Tech Physicians, spoke about adult-onset allergies.

“We see a lot of allergies in kids,” Tarbox said. “But some percent of the population don’t develop allergies until their 20s, 30s or even older.”

According to The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g., the common cold, hay fever) affects approximately 25% of the adult population in the United States.

Factors such as genetics, the environment and what people are exposed to can all contribute to sudden-onset allergies in adults. Allergies develop when an individual’s immune system overreacts to certain foreign substances.

“In the springtime, you have a lot of trees and grasses in the air, and the wind can kick up a lot of dirt,” Tarbox said. “Elevated levels of tree and grass pollen, as well as dirt debris, can trigger a reaction.”

Spring allergies typically start during February and can last until the early summer months. Symptoms can range from mild to severe depending on what type of allergic profile a person fits. Common symptoms of adult-onset allergies include runny nose, itchy eyes, sneezing and congestion.

Allergies can impact various aspects of life, including work, sleep and exercise.

“If your nose is running or you’re coughing, that can be a detriment,” Tarbox said. “You can also have trouble exercising due to shortness of breath.”

An allergy test can be performed on a patient to get an accurate diagnosis. Several different classes of medication can be used to relieve symptoms such as over-the-counter antihistamines, nasal sprays, saline rinses and inhalers.

Tarbox cautioned adult patients when taking new medications as some can cause unwanted side effects. Some allergy medications can react badly to heart medications, inhalers and mood stabilizers. It's important to inform your allergist of all medications you may be taking.

If symptoms are left untreated, there could be adverse long-term effects.

“While many adults might only have mild symptoms, there’s always the potential you can end up having a severe reaction,” Tarbox said.

For those concerned about their allergy symptoms and looking for easy ways to manage them, Tarbox recommended talking with an allergist to discuss treatment options.

“Just because you didn’t have these symptoms growing up doesn’t mean you have to live with them now,” Tarbox said.