

2020 Advisory # 5: Spring is coming: Time to prepare patients with asthma for spring pollen season

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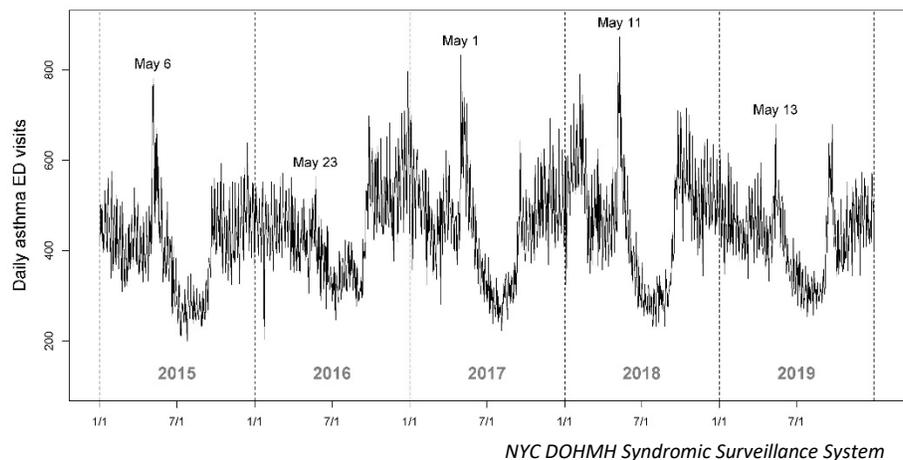
Spring pollen season exacerbates asthma and allergic rhinoconjunctivitis in sensitive patients. **Health care providers can help minimize the impact of pollen season by preparing patients now.**

- Evaluate patients' current respiratory symptoms and ensure that patients are on appropriate medications for their asthma severity.
- Prescribe inhaled corticosteroids for patients with persistent asthma.
- Advise patients to check the pollen forecast every morning on their local TV, radio, or online weather report and consider limiting outdoor activities when forecasts are high.
- Give parents of school children with asthma a signed [Medication Administration Form](#) every year.

Dear Colleagues:

Tree pollens released each spring are an important cause of seasonal allergic illness, including rhinoconjunctivitis and asthma exacerbation, among sensitive patients. Health Department data show that in New York City, over-the-counter allergy medication sales typically increase in late April to early May, coinciding with peak concentrations of certain tree pollens^{1,2} (maple, birch, beech, ash, oak) to which sensitivity is common.³ Asthma emergency department (ED) visits also increase in association with tree pollen season in early- to mid-May, particularly among children.^{2,4}

NYC asthma ED visits, 2015-2019, with peak pollen season dates



While the precise dates and severity of spring pollen allergy season vary (see graph), the narrow timeframe for the increase in ED visits (2-3 weeks) makes it advisable to prepare patients in advance to reduce asthma exacerbations.

Providers can help patients with a history of springtime seasonal allergic illness and asthma prepare for pollen season.

- Systematically follow up with patients who have persistent asthma in advance of the spring pollen season and work with patients to make sure that their asthma is under control before pollen season begins.
- Use your electronic health record (EHR) reporting functionality to create asthma-specific order sets and patient outreach lists. Your EHR vendor can help with these functions.
- Evaluate patients' current level of asthma control and adjust therapy accordingly. Prescribe inhaled corticosteroids for patients with [uncontrolled and/or persistent asthma](#).
- Develop or update written [asthma management plans](#).
- Advise patients to monitor pollen forecasts and consider limiting outdoor activities on high-pollen days.
- Use the [Childhood Asthma and Environmental Triggers](#) fact sheet to educate families about trigger avoidance.

- Refer patients with persistent asthma who have rodents, cockroaches or visible mold in their home to the [Healthy Neighborhoods Program](#) for a free home inspection.

Give parents of school children with asthma a signed [Medication Administration Form](#) (MAF) every year, so school nurses can either administer treatment or monitor students who self-administer medication. The MAF should include a rescue medication, such as albuterol, for all children with asthma. Providers also can require that the child participate in alternative forms of indoor exercise while in school. In addition, authorizing administration of inhaled corticosteroids in school may be a useful strategy for patients with poorly controlled asthma and adherence problems.⁵ The Office of School Health provides free albuterol and fluticasone for in-school use only when authorized with a signed MAF. If you would like to prescribe a different type of inhaled corticosteroid, the family would need to provide it to the school nurse for in-school administration. If you have questions about school services for children with asthma, email OSH@health.nyc.gov.

For community-level data on asthma prevalence, emergency department visits and hospitalizations in New York City, visit the [Environment & Health Data Portal](#).

Thank you,

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References

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