

Seasonal Allergies Taking a Toll?

It's April and blooming again. Colorful bushes and trees are putting on their annual show and it's a sight to see for everyone who's tired of winter drab. But the joy of spring's arrival is diminished for many who suffer the headache, watery eyes, sneezing, and itchy throat of seasonal allergies. If you're among the many sufferers, you know what it's like.

Whenever your allergies emerge, the biggest culprit is seasonal allergic rhinitis, also known as hay fever. Itchy, watery eyes are the first signs; other symptoms include everything from congestion to wheezing, coughing, and disturbed sleep.

It's caused primarily by the release of pollen from grasses, weeds, and ragweed, which send out histamines-chemicals that can trigger inflammation in the eyes, nose, and sinuses. The smartest, though not easiest, step is to avoid the problem altogether. Among strategies to prevent the unpleasant symptoms are:

- Avoid going outside when the pollen count is high (many local news broadcasts report the count during peak allergy season).
- Keep windows closed during pollen season (air conditioning helps clear the air).

The good news, say the experts, is that today's medications are making things a lot less miserable for a lot of people. The right dose of the right medicine can dramatically improve not only how people feel but also the number of days they miss from work as a result of allergies. There are many over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medications, including antihistamines, nasal sprays, eye drops, and allergy shots, that gradually increase one's ability to tolerate allergens. Although there is no cure for allergies, medications can help ease the symptoms. Make sure to consult a doctor before taking any steps, or any medication, to treat the bothersome symptoms of seasonal allergies. If you think you are suffering from allergies, ask to be tested. In addition to the seasonal triggers, many people suffer from year-round allergies to everything from dust mites to cockroaches, indoor molds, and pets.

HM WORKERS' COMPENSATION

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Spring Cleaning for the Workplace Can Enhance Safety and Health

For those who live in colder climates, spring cleaning is an annual ritual that coincides with warmer weather and the ability to open up homes that were tightly battened down against the winter's chill. The idea of an annual cleaning binge is useful in the workplace, too, enabling employers to catch up on things that could otherwise be pushed to the back burner indefinitely.

A good spring cleaning can enhance safety at your workplace if it's done with an eye to eliminating hazards. Take a look at the occasional and infrequent tasks below and decide whether it's time for a good spring cleaning.

De-clutter - Clutter causes hazards. Flammable clutter is a fire hazard; general clutter may create tripping and blocked-exit hazards. De-cluttering, then, is not just an aesthetic pursuit--it also improves safety. Now is the perfect time to dispose of:

Chemicals - Old or unused chemicals create unnecessary workplace hazards. They may be flammable or toxic, and many chemicals that are not dangerous when purchased can become so as they deteriorate over time. Dispose of chemicals that are no longer in use, have passed their use-by dates, and have missing or illegible labels. Be sure to dispose of chemicals properly: Some can be poured down the drain, but others might need to be disposed of as hazardous waste.

Trash - Got a pile of pallets on the loading dock? Dumped a lot of construction debris on the back lot? Anything that's not in use that has piled up should be removed from the site. This will reduce fire hazards, when combustible materials are removed; tripping hazards, when items that are blocking walkways or taking up valuable storage space go away; and pest harborages, when unused materials that make good nesting areas are hauled off.

Equipment. That frayed sling or wobbly ladder may have been taken out of service, but if it can't be readily repaired, why is it still hanging around in the workplace? If it's there, even if it has a "do not use" tag on it, someone in a hurry or not paying close attention might use it anyway--and regret it afterward. Equipment that has been removed from service and won't be promptly repaired should be permanently removed from the premises.

Clean and Repair - Besides clearing out the clutter, your spring cleaning can address infrequent needs that will boost worker safety and health. Find out whether it's time to clean and/or service:

Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. A health hazard evaluation conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that properly maintained HVAC systems were associated with a decreased incidence of lower respiratory symptoms, allergies, and asthma among building occupants. Proper maintenance controls mold, bacteria, allergens, and other contaminants within the system.

Signs and labels. Signs and labels are important for workplace safety, warning workers of low clearances, identifying machinery controls and power sources, showing workers which direction materials in pipes are flowing, and much, much more. But they also take a lot of abuse. Replace damaged signs and illegible labels, clean signs that have become too grimy to read, and re-hang signs that have been knocked askew.

Offices. University of Arizona researchers famously found that office phones, computer keyboards and mice, and desktops harbored 400 times more infectious bacteria than office toilet seats. Yet in most offices, vacuuming and emptying the trash are the only regular cleaning performed. Encourage workers to take disinfecting wipes to office surfaces--not just once a year but daily if possible--to reduce infectious illness transmission in the workplace.



The following safety tips may to help reduce the dangers caused by sun glare:

- Drive cautiously and allow more space from the vehicle in front of you to ensure ample reaction time.
- Make it a habit to lower visors, to help block some of the reflected light.
- Avoid using high-gloss vinyl cleansers on dashboards.
- Keep the inside and outside of the car windshield clean; and ensure that the windshield washer fluid reservoir is full.
- When possible, take an alternate route lined with trees or tall buildings in lieu of one with extreme glare.
- Leave extra time so that you don't feel rushed getting to your destination.
- Eye exams or surgery can make eyes more sensitive to the sunlight. Avoid driving after these appointments.
- Turn on low-beam headlights to help other drivers see you.
- Wear sunglasses at all times. More importantly wear sunglasses with polarized lenses to reduce glare, and lenses with UV protection to shield the eyes from damage.



Spring Driving Tips

With winter fading into the background and better weather all around, you'd think the roads would finally be safe again. This is not always the case. Wet pavement contributes to nearly 1.2 million traffic crashes each year. Rainy days- Spring rains bring slippery road conditions and flooding. Slippery road reduce your cars handling and increase the distance it takes to stop (up to 4 times normal stopping distance). Big puddles can also cut down on tire traction and lead to hydroplaning.

Slow down and leave room - Slowing down during wet weather driving can be critical to reducing a cars chance of hydroplaning. With as little as 1/12 inch of water on the road, tires have to displace a gallon of water per second to keep the rubber meeting the road.

Flooded Roads - The reason that so many people drown during flooding is because few of them realize the incredible power of water. A mere six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock over an adult. It takes only two feet of rushing water to carry away most vehicles. This includes pickups and SUVs. If you come to an area that is covered with water, you will not know the depth of the water or the condition of the ground under the water. This is especially true at night, when your vision is more limited. Play it smart, play it safe.

Whether driving or walking, any time you come to a flooded road Turn Around!

Avoid Cruise Control - This feature works great in dry conditions, but when used in wet conditions, the chance of losing control of the vehicle can increase. A driver may need to reduce the cars speed by lifting off the accelerator, which can't be done when using cruise control.

Winter road wear and tear - In Pennsylvania, winter wreaks havoc on the roads. Snow plows, salt, sand and the aftermath of ice can all leave roads battered and with potholes. It is best to avoid them entirely, but if that is not possible; don't brake during the pothole impact. Instead, apply brakes before hitting a pothole and release them just prior to impact. More people on the road - Spring brings cyclists, walkers and children out of hibernation - BE ALERT!

Construction Projects - Watch for changing traffic patterns, lower speed limits and construction workers, extra time may be needed to get to your destination.

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Time for Lyme

Spring means ticks and tick-borne illnesses

The [Lyme Disease Association](#) (LDA) reminds everyone that ticks, which transmit Lyme disease, become more active when temperatures are above 35° F.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), more cases of Lyme disease are reported than any other vector-borne disease in the United States. In 2011, the CDC reported 33,097 Lyme disease cases in the United States. With only 10 percent of cases actually reported, numbers may actually exceed 300,000 annually.

Most of these cases are reported from the Northeast and upper Midwest. See LDA's website (www.lymediseaseassociation.org) for a [state-by-state Lyme legislation table](#).

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*. People become infected with the Lyme disease bacteria when they are bitten by an infected blacklegged tick. The CDC cautions that ticks can also transmit diseases other than Lyme disease, including Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis, anaplasmosis, Colorado tick fever, and Powassan encephalitis.

As you spend time outdoors during spring and summer, you need to be aware of the risk of tick bites. If not diagnosed and treated early, the LDA says Lyme disease can lead to disseminated infection affecting every system in the body, including the cardiac and central nervous systems. Mental confusion, memory problems, weakness, arthritis, and gastrointestinal problems may occur.