

Stiff upper lip

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Eleven-year-old Bayley Norwood of Kennesaw doesn't flinch Tuesday as he gets his allergy shot at the Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic in Marietta. LPN Jamie Moon gives the shot as Dr. Stanley Fineman watches.
Photo by Samantha Wilson



Dr. Fineman administers a check-up to Reid Usrey, 8, of Kennesaw before giving him an allergy shot Tuesday.
Photo by Samantha Wilson



MARIETTA - Get ready, because the pollen is coming.

According to allergist Dr. Stanley Fineman with the Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic on Canton Road in Marietta, that yellowish pollen coating could hit Cobb and the Atlanta area later this week or early next week.

"Fortunately for patients with allergies, we've had an unusual spring season in that the pollen counts have been low, so people haven't had as much problem," Fineman said. "So what we're suggesting for patients is to make sure they're taking their allergy medications before the pollen hits, because we anticipate later this week and next week will be extremely high counts."

Tuesday's pollen count was low at 24, with major pollen contributions from cedar and oak. According to Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic's Web site, the pollen count in March has been "extremely high" only three days this month. This is mild compared to pollen count numbers last year in March, when the Atlanta area saw nine days that month in the extremely high category.

The pollen count is based on the amount of pollen particles measured in a cubic meter of air and is placed into four categories: low, 0-30; moderate, 31-60; high, 61-120; and extremely high, 120 plus.

Allergist Eugene Hurwitz, of the Center for Allergy and Asthma of West Georgia, which has seven locations including one in Smyrna, cautioned that Atlanta is a hotbed for pollen because of its green vegetation and abundance of trees like oak, hickory and birch, which all cause a lot of allergy problems. He also said that indoor allergies caused by dust mites are common because the critters tend to like the Georgia humidity.

While the warm weather is likely a welcome change from one of the most severe winters Atlanta has seen in years, it can also mean lots of sniffing, sneezing and stuffiness for allergy sufferers.

"We usually see the tree pollen peaking this time of the year, and that starts to go down in April and May," Fineman said. "But then we see the grass pollens up in April and May. We'll probably see the grasses through the summer and then the ragweed in the fall - so it's kind of like a cycle."

Pollen counts are usually the highest on dry warm days, when the pollen will have the most time to spread through the air, Fineman said. On rainy days the pollen is washed away and counts are generally lower.

On those dry days, Fineman said, it is important for seasonal allergy sufferers to be aware of the pollen count and stay indoors as much as possible. Pollen is at its peak between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m., Hurwitz said.

Avoiding the triggers is the best non-medicinal way to fight allergies, both doctors said. That means keeping car windows shut, using air conditioning, wearing a mask while mowing the lawn, and showering and washing hair before bedtime, Hurwitz said.

Taking allergy medicine before the onset of symptoms may also help, the doctors said.

But seasonal allergies do not have to keep people indoors, Hurwitz said. Prescription medications are available, and allergy shots can reduce symptoms by 80 to 90 percent, he said.

"It's amazing how many people come to see us that have suffered with allergies for many, many years and when they realize there's something that can be done, they're really very happy," Hurwitz said.

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology's Web site, www.allergyandasthmarelief.org, has a quiz to help users figure out if they need to see an allergist.