

# Allergy season starts early, but it could be a mild one

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Hang on to your tissues. Experts say this allergy season is off to an early start and will be one of the longest.

But locally, pollen counts are at about normal levels, said Tony Kavanaugh, a certified pollen counter and medical laboratory technician for Allergy Associates of La Crosse.

The season began early because of the mild winter and unseasonably warm spring weather, causing trees to bud and bloom and release pollen and mold much earlier, said Dr. Mark Moss at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.

The tree and grass pollen arrived a couple weeks early in mid-March.

The good news: Local allergy sufferers might get fewer stuffy noses and sinus headaches. Kavanaugh predicts a more mild allergy season than last year.

Ragweed and mold are looking to be normal so far.

The ragweed season will peak from about Sept. 9 through the end of the month. Mold will reach higher levels if temperatures get above 80 degrees, typically from now until the end of September.

It's a far cry from places like Milwaukee and Chicago, which are experiencing very high counts, said Amanda Lowery, marketing communications manager of Allergy Associates of La Crosse and Allergychoices.

That's thanks to the back and forth weather, with an early start to the growing season and then droughts, then a lot of rain. Here, there haven't been many huge rain storms, and temperatures have remained mild recently.

If you're among the 10 to 20 percent of Americans who suffer from ragweed allergy, also referred to as hay fever, avoidance measures can be helpful to ease the symptoms. Wear a mask when doing yard work, take a shower after spending time outdoors to rinse off pollen, and keep your house and car windows closed to prevent pollen from getting in.



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## About allergies

— Ragweed plants live only one season but can produce up to a billion pollen grains. These grains can travel through the air for up to 400 miles.

— The symptoms of hay fever include eye irritation, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, puffy eyes, itchy nose and throat, and for those with severe allergies it can also lead to asthma attacks, chronic sinusitis and headaches.

— Peak pollen times are generally between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Pollen counts vary from day to day. Pollen counts more than 100 are considered high.

— Pollen counts reflect what is going on over a 24-hour period and are considered a helpful guide for minimizing exposure to the allergen.

— Allergy symptoms can be managed with over-the-counter or prescription medications in the form of pills, nasal sprays or eye drops. In more persistent cases, allergy shots or drops may be used.