

# Asthma & Allergy Center

Courteous Competent Care with Compassion

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## We Want to Hear From You!

Help us serve you and all our patients better.

Please send your suggestions, questions and comments.

We look forward to hearing from you!

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## Asthma & Allergy News

### Winter of 2014-15

Greetings and welcome to the new winter issue of the Asthma and Allergy Center Newsletter.

For people with asthma and allergies, the holidays present health challenges unique to the winter season. Busier-than-usual social schedules, chilly weather and cherished family customs combined make staying healthy a daily priority for people with asthma and allergy.

### **Holidays and Food Allergies: It's All about Planning**

The holidays are filled with fun and family traditions, many of them surrounding food. For those with food allergies, the temptation to indulge can sometimes be too great, leading to allergic reactions. If you or a loved one has food allergies, planning ahead can be the key to an allergy-free holiday.

Ask hosts and restaurant staff about the menu before the dinner or event. Let people know your restrictions so that they can serve some safe foods. Have plenty of options ready in the event that you have to bring along an allergen-free dish, and cook ahead to keep your family eating healthy in this busy season.

No matter how much time you spend planning, some events cannot be predicted. If you or family members have food allergies, carry your epinephrine injection with you at all times.

For more information about Food Allergy or about Anaphylaxis, please visit [Patient Education](#) page of our website, and scroll down to the subject.

### **Outdoor Mold Allergies Can be a Problem Even in Winter**

People with asthma or allergies should always be prepared, and the winter season is no different. For those allergic to mold, assuring that inside spaces have low-humidity, and outside spaces are free from leaf piles that gather mold can go a long way toward controlling reactions. If you must rake leaves or go into the crawl space wear gloves and wear a mask to keep from inhaling the mold, and as always, have your medication on hand.

For more information about Molds and Mold Allergies visit our [Patient Education](#) page on our website.

### **Winter Asthma Tips**

#### **Cold Weather and Asthma**

Cover your face with a scarf when outdoors to warm the air before it enters your lungs. If you are going to exercise in cold weather, discuss and create an asthma action plan with us to determine when medication is needed and any precautions that you should take.

#### **Indoor Air**

Winter means spending more time indoors, so those with asthma and allergies should pay attention to indoor air quality. Make sure stoves are vented properly and that chimneys are cleaned. Add solid doors to the fireplace opening to cut down on as much smoke in the home as possible. Replace furnace filters, check humidifiers and clean air exchanges.

If you use a tabletop humidifier (whether hot or cold), make sure you EMPTY AND WIPE DRY and let it stay dry for a few hours before you refill it - every single day.

When decorating with items that have been in storage, clear as much dust from them as possible before using. Clean and dry the decorations before storing, enclose them in plastic bags and store in cool dry place to control mold and dust for next year.

#### **Additional Tips**

- Using an artificial tree is a way to go, but not the type with sprayed-on snow or pine scent as these are allergens.
- If you must use a real tree, clean it thoroughly before it enters the home to remove as much pollen, mold, and mildew as possible.
- Be prepared with your asthma or allergy action plan and carry all necessary medications with you at all times.
- Be aware that strong odors can trigger asthma, and avoid use of fragrant candles and sprays etc. in your home.
- Make sure that you and your family get the flu shot as early as possible. Check with us or your Primary care provider to find out if you also need the pneumonia vaccine.

## PENICILLIN ALLERGY:

What percentage of people who report allergy to Penicillin are found to be *really allergic* when tested?

1 to 2 %

10 - 15 % ✓

40 - 50 %

## Allergy and Asthma Facts from ACAAI

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) is a great resource for information regarding asthma and allergies. Following are a few facts from ACAAI.

### Allergy Facts

- 16.9 million adults and 6.7 million children have been diagnosed with hay fever in the last year.
- Immunotherapy (allergy shots) helps reduce hay fever symptoms in about 85 percent of people with allergic rhinitis.
- Allergic diseases, which include asthma, are the fifth most prevalent chronic diseases in all ages, and the third most common in children.
- 8.3 million American children have respiratory allergies.
- An estimated 9.5 million American children have skin allergies.
- Food allergies in children are on the rise, affecting nearly 6 million or 8% of children

- Upper Respiratory infections such as flu or other viruses can cause sinusitis or severe asthma exacerbation. Be sure to monitor symptoms closely and call us or come in if needed. It is easier to treat if you come in early in the course of the illness.
- We will give you an action plan as to what to do on the first sign of increase in asthma symptoms and if that does not work, call us.

## Holiday Allergy and Asthma Triggers

For sufferers of hay-fever and other warm weather allergies, winter seems like a welcome break. That is not always the case, though, as newly-introduced allergens can cause anywhere from minor symptoms to full-blown attacks.

### Common holiday triggers to watch for (Besides Food!):

- Cold Air
- Travel
- Mold from fallen leaves, trees or firewood
- Dust from stored decorations
- Scents from candles
- Smoke (Tobacco or wood)
- Stress

## Winter Sports with Asthma

For athletes with asthma, cold weather exercise requires planning. Exercise-induced bronchospasm (EIB) occurs when cold dry air hits the bronchial tubes. Symptoms of EIB are:

- Chest Tightness
- Wheezing
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Chest Pain (**This is not a common symptom, and could indicate cardiac distress. If you have chest pain, call 911 or seek immediate medical treatment.**)

### EIB is more likely if:

- If it is extremely cold
- If there is environmental air pollution
- If you have an Upper Respiratory infection
- If you have Poorly controlled Allergies or Asthma

EIB does not have to limit your exercise ability or participation in winter sports. With adequately controlled asthma and allergies and some advance planning you can enjoy the great outdoors any time of the year. Talk to us if you are having trouble with EIB this winter.

## COPD in Women on the Rise

More and more women are showing up with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). COPD mortality has risen over 150% in the last ten years, and the greatest increase happens to be in women. But there is good news. There are many new medications that can ease the symptoms and prevent the progress of the disease if the patient is not smoking any more.

COPD, and a closely related disease Chronic Bronchitis are inflammatory diseases that cause permanent damage to the airways and the airspaces in the lungs. In America, 80% of the cases diagnosed with COPD are caused by smoking, with symptoms showing about ten years after beginning to smoke.

A large number of Smoker COPD sufferers also have Asthma.

In non smokers COPD is most commonly caused by long term uncontrolled Asthma.

Patients, especially smokers, should learn to recognize the symptoms of COPD and have regular breathing tests. Early detection and treatment can prevent further damage to the lungs, improve quality of life and prolong survival.

## ACAAI Annual Meeting

During this year's American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) Annual Scientific Meeting, members presented findings from their studies. These are some of those findings that were used to create an infographic describing the meeting:

1. Emergency supplies of epinephrine in schools save lives. 15% of children with severe allergies will have an episode at school.
2. Two recent studies show that 94% of people who believe they are allergic to penicillin actually test as negative for penicillin allergy.
3. 85% of internists advised patients with egg allergy to skip the flu shot, but it is now known to be safe.
4. Parents and YouTube get low grades. Studies show that teens are more knowledgeable about treating their asthma than their parents and that YouTube viewers watch more videos based on alternative treatments that are not scientifically proven instead of videos featuring education from providers.

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With expert guidance, you and your families can enjoy all the festivities and fun that the holidays bring.

At the Asthma and Allergy Center, all of us are ready to assist you so you have a healthy and productive winter this year (and every year!). We all wish you a safe and wonderful Holiday Season!

Sincerely,

**Chandra M Kumar MD**

**ASTHMA & ALLERGY CENTER**

**Charleston WV; Parkersburg WV (Marietta OH and Belpre OH); Beckley WV**

**Logan WV; Ripley WV; Montgomery WV**