

Ragweed is Here!

During the fall season you may notice that you sneeze and have a runny nose more than usual. August 15th marks the unofficial start of ragweed season. This means that the country's 36 million seasonal allergy sufferers will want to take precautions to avoid exposure to ragweed, a stubborn plant that can grow in practically any region. Almost no place in the United States is ragweed-free. Ragweed produces one billion pollen grains per average season. These grains can travel up to 400 miles due to their lightweight texture which can easily carry in the wind. It commonly grows in fields, along roadsides and in vacant lots. Ragweed is most prevalent throughout the Northeast, South and Midwest from mid-August to October, making it a significant cause of fall allergies.



What symptoms are caused by ragweed?

Ragweed causes what most people commonly refer to as "hay fever," or what allergist/immunologists refer to as allergic rhinitis, which is caused by breathing in allergens such as pollen. When exposed to ragweed, allergy sufferers often experience *sneezing, runny noses and swollen, itchy, watery eyes*. These symptoms of allergic rhinitis can have a major impact on a person's quality of life, including his or her ability to function well at school or work. Nearly 80% of patients with seasonal allergies experience sleep problems, leading to fatigue, loss of concentration and poor performance at work and school. In fact, each year, more than 3.8 million days of work and school are missed due to the abundance of ragweed in the air which, in turn, causes seasonal allergies.

How can you avoid ragweed exposure?

To reduce exposure to ragweed, remember the following tips:

- Avoid areas where ragweed plants thrive, including ditches, vacant lots, roadsides, riverbanks and the edges of wooded areas.
- Keep windows closed at all times during ragweed season to prevent pollen from drifting into your home. Use air conditioning, which cools, cleans and dries the air.
- Keep your car windows closed when traveling.
- Minimize outdoor activity when pollen counts are high.
- Take a shower after spending time outside; pollen can collect on your hair and skin.
- Minimize your exposure to other known allergens during ragweed season, since symptoms are the result of a cumulative effect of multiple allergens.

How can you treat allergies caused by ragweed?

It is important to talk to an allergist/immunologist for advice on how you can prevent and control your allergies caused by ragweed. To help alleviate and relieve symptoms, your physician may prescribe medications such as:

- Antihistamine pills
- Nasal corticosteroid sprays
- Decongestant pills or sprays
- Allergen immunotherapy



Microscopic view
of ragweed pollen