

## WHAT IS POLLEN?

Pollen grains are the dust-like male reproductive parts of plants. When pollen becomes airborne you may inhale it or get it into your eyes. If you are one of the 35.9 million people in the United States that are allergic to pollen, you will experience Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis.



Russian Olive - leaf, fruit and pollen

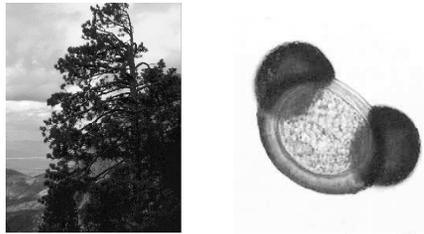
## WHAT IS SEASONAL ALLERGIC RHINITIS?

Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis is the medical term for what is commonly called hay fever. It refers to symptoms caused by pollen from trees, grasses and weeds. Unlike the name implies, hay fever does not come from hay and fever is not one of the symptoms.

Symptoms can include sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes, coughing, stuffy nose, clear watery nasal discharge, itchy eyes and back of the throat. Symptoms that persist for more than a week increase the likelihood that allergies are the cause and not the common cold.

## WHAT IS A POLLEN COUNT?

A pollen count is the actual count of the pollen in a cubic meter of air. The air is sampled by a device that collects the pollen on an acrylic rod greased with silicone called a Rotorod Sampler. The rod is spun at 2400 rpm's for a specified period of time, after which the rod is stained and the pollen is counted under a microscope. The pollen is identified by type and reported as the number of grains per cubic meter of air.



Pondersora Pine, pollen and tree

## WHAT DOES THE POLLEN COUNT MEAN?

Pollen counts are reported in ranges to help individuals and their physicians relate the pollen level to the anticipated severity of the allergy symptoms. The most common way to categorize pollen is listed in the following table.

	TREES	GRASS	WEEDS
<b>ABSENT:</b>	0	0	0
<b>LOW:</b>	0 - 15	0 - 5	0 - 10
<b>MODERATE:</b>	15 - 90	5 - 20	10 - 50
<b>HIGH:</b>	90 - 599	20 - 50	50 - 90
<b>VERY HIGH:</b>	over 600	over 50	over 90

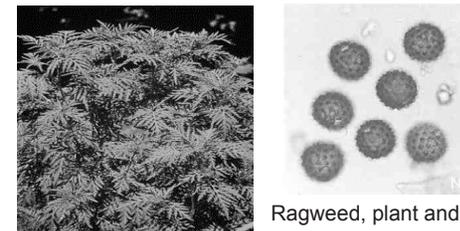
These levels are consistent with levels currently used by the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI), modified for the local area based on historical data.

## YEARLY ALLERGEN CYCLES

Plant cycles are seasonal. Trees produce the most pollen from February to May, grasses from April to August and weeds from July to September.

## HOW CAN A POLLEN COUNT HELP ME?

If you already know what pollens you are allergic to, by using the pollen counts you can anticipate when your symptoms will begin or worsen as those counts start to go up. If you do not know which pollens you are allergic to, make a note of what pollens are high when you notice your symptoms beginning or worsening. With time you will be able to notice a pattern and begin to anticipate when your allergies will begin and start medication or therapy to lessen your symptoms.



Ragweed, plant and pollen

## **MEDICATIONS**

Medications are available to lessen the severity of your allergy symptoms. Many over the counter allergy medications can cause drowsiness and should be used with caution by school age children and when driving or operating machinery. Prescription medications are available that are non-drowsy. Contact your physician or allergist for more information.

## **IS THERE A CURE FOR ALLERGIES?**

Currently there is no cure for allergies, although allergy shots have proven very effective in reducing the severity of allergies. New procedures to help reduce or eliminate allergy symptoms are being developed and may be available in the future. Talk to your physician or allergist to see if this type of therapy is right for you.

## **HOW CAN I FIND THE POLLEN COUNT FOR MY AREA?**

You can find the local pollen count by looking at the Benton-Franklin Health District's WEB Site at [www.bfhd.wa.gov](http://www.bfhd.wa.gov). The pollen information may also be found in the "Tri City Herald"

on the weather page. You may also call the Benton-Franklin Health District Laboratory at (509) 460-4206.

---

---

For more information contact:

Benton-Franklin Health District  
7102 W. Okanogan Place  
Kennewick, WA 99336  
Environmental Health      509.460.4205  
Laboratory                      509.460.4206  
Website: <http://www.bfhd.wa.gov>

BFHD-E-0069 (Rev. 7/08)

# Pollen Counts & Allergic Rhinitis

**Home Safety Series**



[www.bfhd.wa.gov](http://www.bfhd.wa.gov)