



Allergy News

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Do Thunderstorms Cause Allergies?

Just about a year ago you may have seen/heard news reports that sounded just like “fake news” -- that thunderstorms caused severe allergic reactions! Even more shocking is the news that a relationship between thunderstorms and allergies is true. But are they a cause of allergic reaction? Not exactly, but an allergic reaction due to thunderstorm activity can be severe even for mild allergy sufferers if proper precautions are not taken.

8500 in Australia Affected

The unusual relationship between thunderstorms and allergies has been studied for years in Europe and Oceania but is little-known in North America. The event reported on last year in Melbourne, Australia, was

surprising in the number of people affected (8500+) and in the tragic loss of 8 people due to the severity of the thunderstorm asthma event.

(<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-29/thunderstorm-asthma-eighth-person-dies-from-melbourne/8074776>)

As reported by abc.net.au, “The humid weather change ... caused pollen, most likely from rye grass, to burst into tiny particles that were able to be inhaled through the nose and enter the lungs. It caused many people, including those who had no history of asthma or respiratory issues to experience mild to severe breathing difficulties.”

Those who have experienced a severe asthma attack can relate to one victim’s complaint that it

felt “like an elephant’s foot on his chest” and was worse than any previous asthma attack. Many people affected had never before experienced an asthmatic episode.



Can this happen here?

Certain parts of Canada are more prone to severe thunderstorm activity than other areas but there has been no previous occurrence of such an event as widespread as occurred in Australia. Regardless, the suddenness and severity of this event is an important reminder that even those with mild asthma risks can still become acutely affected unexpectedly, and without an action plan and current medication nearby there is a danger of life-threatening illness.

Whether one is a regular asthma sufferer or suspects a first-time experience due to any cause, one should be treated immediately if a relationship between thunderstorms and an asthma attack is suspected.



Symptoms may indicate other inhalant allergies, so clinical testing and diagnosis should be the first step toward understanding and managing allergic health. In the Melbourne case, it was thought that rye grass was the primary irritant but many other pollens and environmental allergens can be broken up to microscopic form and cause severe reactions. A preventative desensitization and treatment plan should follow after allergens are identified.

Here is our advice on dealing with a weather-related asthma attack:

1. See an allergist or respirologist to help determine triggers. An asthma management plan will be created by you and your doctor to keep symptoms controlled.
2. If you have allergic asthma and any variety of pollen is a trigger, review the weather, especially when storms, humidity and the pollen count are high.
3. Find an asthma support group. Like any other illness, asthma is easier to endure if you have support from others.
4. Ask your doctor for more information on weather-related asthma and prevention/treatment protocols.

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