

Date: July 2003

Contact: Heidi M. Gordon
Director of Communications
hgordon@ohioafp.org

ALLERGIES OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR COMMON COLD

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—Allergies affect one out of six Americans and cost millions of dollars in medications, physician services and missed days from school and work.

It is important to work with your family physician to determine if your symptoms are the common cold or an ongoing allergy problem.

According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, an allergy is an abnormal reaction to an ordinarily harmless substance called an allergen. When the allergen, such as pollen, is absorbed into the body of an allergic person, that person's immune system views the allergen as an invader and a chain reaction of symptoms such as a runny nose, watery eyes, itching and sneezing result.

There are several allergens. The most common ones include pollens, molds, dust mites, animal dander (dead skin flakes from animals with fur); foods; medications; cockroach droppings and insect stings.

There are many options available to treat allergic responses. Two of the four main medical options available are antihistamines and decongestants. If you think you may be suffering from allergies, visit your family physician for testing, treatment and relief.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.

FACT SHEET

Date: July 2003

Contact: Heidi M. Gordon
Director of Communications
hgordon@ohioafp.org

ALLERGIES OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR COMMON COLD

- Allergies affect as many as 40 million people in the United States.
- Allergic diseases affect more than 20 percent of the U.S. population and are the sixth leading cause of chronic disease in the country.
- It is estimated that in 1998, increased absenteeism and reduced productivity due to allergies cost U.S. companies more than \$250 million.

Hay Fever

- At least 35 million people in the United States have seasonal allergic rhinitis, known as hay fever.
- Sixteen million office visits to healthcare providers each year are attributed to allergic rhinitis.
- The estimated overall costs of allergic rhinitis in the U.S. in 1996 totaled \$6 billion.

Sinus and Asthma

- Sinusitis develops in approximately 31 million Americans each year. Chronic sinusitis affects nearly 35 million people in the United States.
- There is an association between sinusitis and asthma. The incidence of sinusitis in asthmatic subjects ranges from 40 to 75 percent.

Food Allergies

- Eight percent of children younger than 6 years experience food intolerances. Of this group, 2 to 4 percent appear to have allergic reactions to food. In adults, an estimated 1 to 2 percent are sensitive to food or food additives.
- Peanut and/or tree nut (e.g. walnut, almond, cashew) allergy affects about 3 million Americans.
- In the United States 100 people die each year from food-related anaphylaxis and at least 40 deaths occur annually from reactions to insect stings.

Source: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology