

Extreme misery in the wind, says That Pollen Guy

By Nick
OVERALL



THE onset of an “extreme” hay fever and asthma season will be adding to the covid woes of many locals.

Prof Simon Haberle, director of ANU School of Culture, History and Language, is the expert leading a team of researchers who track daily pollen and spore counts on the Canberra Pollen website.

Known on social media as “That Pollen Guy”, he says allergy sufferers can expect a congested season ahead, and it’s the extreme levels of pollen from Cypress Pine trees in the Canberra region that are to blame.

“On August 12 we saw our first extreme allergenic pollen day of cypress pine pollen, which was followed on August 16 by another extreme cypress pollen day in combination with high pine pollen as well,” he says.

“A combination of the warming weather, a wet winter with high soil moisture and windy days are all signs that are pointing to another record pollen season.

“Another factor is the Bureau of Meteorology’s latest forecast that above average winter-spring rainfall



Prof Simon Haberle... “warming weather, a wet winter and windy days are all signs that are pointing to another record pollen season.”

for southern and eastern Australia is likely to continue into spring.”

Prof Haberle says Canberra is known as the “allergy capital”, with the highest rates of hay fever of any city in Australia.

Nearly a third of Canberrans suffer some form of hay fever or as its scientifically known, allergic rhinitis, and these allergies cost the ACT economy at least \$170 million a year through the impacts on people’s health, happiness and productivity.

But despite its name, hay fever is



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neither caused by hay, nor results in a fever.

In fact, according to Narelle Williamson, a respiratory educator and senior clinical advisor at the National Asthma Council Australia, hay fever is an immune response triggered by an allergic reaction to pollen, which enters through the nose and is breathed into the lungs.

“It’s an inflammation in the lining of the nose where the nasal passages become red, swollen and sensitive to pollen,” she says.

According to Ms Williamson, the

season ahead is also bad news for asthmatics, as over 80 per cent of people with asthma suffer from hay fever as well.

“One in nine Australians have asthma and one in five have hay fever, the two go very closely together,” she says.

On top of an itchy nose and irritated eyes, she says asthmatics can also experience shortness of breath, coughing and wheezing, making day-to-day life even more difficult and dangerous.

Ms Williamson says it’s incredibly important for those who have hay fever or asthma to get advice from their GP and create a treatment plan.

“Those who don’t have hay fever or asthma plans are most at risk,” she says.

She also says there’s a series of digital resources people can keep an eye on to steer clear of pollen entirely.

“In Canberra you can download the ‘Canberra Pollen Count’ app or there’s the ‘AirRater’ app, which will tell you about what the pollen count is going to be the next day,” she says.

“Watching the weather forecast is good, too; they’ll often talk about pollen counts so people can be warned about the air quality of the next day.

“If it’s going to be a high-pollen day we advise staying inside, closing your windows, turning off your air conditioner or using recirculated air in your car or house.”

She also says days of rainfall with high pollen counts are ones to be wary of.

“Rainfall can fragment pollen into tiny fragments and make them much easier to breathe in,” she says.

“Towards the end of the season where you’ve had higher rainfall there’s more pollen due to the prolific grass growth.”

Ms Williamson says face coverings can help filter out larger pollen.

“Any type of mask will definitely reduce some amount of pollen, anything across your mouth and nose as long as it’s worn correctly,” she says.

“It’s also important to note that while good management can help asthma and hay fever it’s also critical at the moment to get tested for covid, people may think it’s just their hay fever playing up when it might be covid.”

The allergy capital we may be, but Prof Haberle’s research is hoping to “clear the air” for anyone confused about pollen allergy risks throughout the ACT.

“We’re developing spatial maps of pollen allergy risk across Canberra using surveys of garden and street plants,” Prof Haberle said.

“These are being developed with my colleague Dr Simon Connor who says Canberra’s leafy inner suburbs are the worst for tree-pollen allergies, while the outer suburbs are more exposed to grass-pollen allergies.”

More at canberrapollen.com.au