



The Wheezing & Sneezing Times

Academy Allergy, Asthma & Sinus, P.C.



What Difference Does it Make to My Asthma if the Ozone Level Is High?

Announcement:

We have a new policy regarding allergy shots. If you have a cough the day of your shot, we will not be able to give you your allergy shot! There will be **NO** exceptions to this new policy! This policy is in place for your safety! Thank you for your cooperation!

Points of Interest:

- Track up-to-date pollen counts, mold counts and air quality in the announcement section of our website.
- We appreciate your **feedback!**

Please click within the feedback box located at the bottom right corner of our website and give us your suggestions!

What is Ozone Anyway?

Ozone is a colorless, odorless gas made up of *three* oxygen atoms joined together. The oxygen that our bodies need to breathe is made of *two* oxygen atoms joined together. Ozone is considered pollution when it is close to the Earth's surface (closer than 10 miles) because it is ready to react with whatever it meets, including living tissues like our lungs, causing damage and asthma flares. Ozone can also corrode building materials, statues and monuments.

Wait a Minute, I Thought Ozone was Protective!

The ozone layer, found 10 to 30 miles from the Earth's surface, is considered protective against the sun's harmful UV rays. This is far above the air we breathe.

How Does Ozone Get Close to the Earth's Surface?

Ozone can be found close to the Earth's surface in warm and sunny areas with heavy traffic and numerous industrial plants. The cars, trucks and other motor vehicles along with the industrial plants release the "ingredients" for ozone. The sun and heat are what form the ingredients into ozone pollution. As you can imagine, ozone levels tend to increase in the summer when the days are warmer and sunnier.

So what Does this Mean for Me and My Asthma?

When ozone comes in contact with the lining of our lungs, it attacks and damages cells lining the airways. This causes redness and swelling that some have compared to a sun burn inside our lungs. This in turn will lead to an asthma flare.

Where Can I Get Current Ozone Level Information and what Do I Do when it Is High?

Keep an eye on the air quality section of our website for up-to-date ozone levels. When the ozone level is high, avoid staying outside for long periods of time. Keep the windows to your home and car closed and turn on the air conditioning. Have your rescue inhaler handy in case you need it.

Kerry McGuffog, RN, AE-C

Sources: EPA; United States Environmental Protection Agency (Website); JAMA; VOL.29 NO. 4, 1/28/04; Environmental Health Perspectives; VOL 104, NO. 12, 12/1996



HIPAA—What is it? And how does it affect you?

HIPAA stands for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. One part of this law that became effective on April 14, 2003 affects all patients of health care providers whether in an office, hospital or pharmacy setting. This portion of the HIPAA law relates to privacy.

The government made specific rulings that all medical practices are required to follow. The privacy rule of HIPAA protects what the government calls PHI or Protected Health Information. This includes any information created or received by a health care provider, health plan, public health authority, employer, life insurer, school or university, or health care clearinghouse. In other words, this includes your actual medical chart and any billing or claim information.

Our office has always held our patients' privacy with respect. We have taken specific measures to ensure your privacy is maintained.

- **Document Destruction:** We purchased a shredder that we use for all documents that contain patient information. By shredding these in house, we also limit the number of hands (and eyes) viewing information.
- **Notice of Privacy Practices:** These are given to all our patients to show how we use your medical information and to whom we release this information. A copy of our Notice of Privacy Practices is also located in our waiting rooms and on our website in the Downloadable Forms box.
- **Release of Information:** We require medical release of information forms for copies of health records. These releases are only good for 60 days per the HIPAA ruling. The only exception to this would be if we actually refer you to another physician.
- **Business Agreements:** We have also signed agreements with all of our vendors that they agree to keep any patient information private. Examples of these vendors are our practice management software, electronic medical records, infectious waste, accountant, cleaning service, banks, etc.
- **Passwords:** Our computers are password protected, both at the operating system level and software program level.

These are just a few examples of the many procedures our office implemented for the HIPAA laws. Every effort is made to protect your privacy. If you ever have any questions relating to your privacy, please call our office and ask to speak to the privacy officer.

Melanie Stella, Front Office Coordinator



Are Allergies and Asthma Influenced by Global Warming?

That is a good question! Recent studies show that there may be a connection between the rise of allergies and asthma and the changing global climate. Studies have found that a high level of carbon dioxide increases the growth of plants whose pollen triggers allergies. We all know that plants thrive with high carbon dioxide and warmer air; allergy producing plants react the same.



Much research remains. No one has measured populations of allergy-inducing plants nationwide to determine a pattern of change in pollen and the global climate. Until more data is obtained, it is believed that climate change may contribute to the rise in allergies and asthma, but scientists agree that it may not be the only answer.

For years, scientists have tried to explain the dramatic increase in allergies and asthma. Today, roughly 35 million Americans suffer from seasonal allergies and about 20 million suffer from asthma. Could global warming have an impact on the increased incidence of these diseases?

Jennifer Mierau, RN, AE-C

It is no surprise that cities contain more heat and carbon dioxide than their surrounding areas. The heat is associated with the "heat island" effect (a dome of higher temperatures caused by the warmth absorbed, then reflected, by structures and pavement). The increased carbon dioxide is released from a greater number of cars moving around and through the city. Both factors influence the global warming effect.



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