

An astonishing 25 per cent of all hospitalizations for asthma occur in this period, he adds.

Why is September so intense for allergies and asthma?

There are several reasons. First of all, seasonal allergies from plants are always bad this month. And this year, we had more than the usual number of rain storms, which broke up and activated pollen particles, so there are more particles to be inhaled. Secondly, in July and August, when people feel well and aren't wheezing, they tend to stop taking their asthma medication, even if they are supposed to be taking it as a preventative. This makes them vulnerable to getting their asthma back when they re-enter school and work. The third thing is, when kids go back to school, they touch, they share and the first colds are passed around.

"This all happens bang on when ragweed is the worst," says Dr. Greenwald. "It's the perfect storm."

Allergists' offices are inundated with patients right now. "I'm already seeing it," said Dr. Greenwald. "And it's building to a peak."

Typically, the peak for adults is about a week and a half after the children are sick, as they have caught colds from their kids.

If you have bad allergies, you should get a referral to an allergist, suggests Dr. Greenwald. The trouble with over-the-counter medications such as anti-histamines or eye drops is that they may relieve the symptoms, but they don't reverse the actual allergy. "That might work for a couple of years. Then, your allergy gets worse and you have to double the dose. Finally, it is so bad you have to go see your doctor," predicts Dr. Greenwald.

He suggests seeing a specialist before that happens. "Get in young, early and mild, before you have to fight hard," he says. Allergies that are allowed to get worse can ultimately turn into asthma.

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