

Factsheet 35

Updated on 08 March 2021

COVID-19 vs. Allergic Rhinitis

March marks the beginning of Spring and for many the effects of allergic rhinitis begins. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues it is important that people are aware of the differences of the symptoms associated with COVID-19 and allergic rhinitis.

What are COVID-19 symptoms?

In line with the government advice, the main symptoms of coronavirus are:

1. a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
2. a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
3. a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Many people with coronavirus have at least one of these symptoms.

What are Allergic Rhinitis symptoms?

Allergic rhinitis is usually worse between late March and September and when the weather is warm, humid, and windy. During these times the pollen count is at its highest. Different people have allergies to different pollen for example, grass pollen and tree pollen.

Tree pollen occurs first, normally from late March to mid-May affecting around 25% of people. Grass pollen is the most common allergy and affects more people with allergic rhinitis occurring between mid-May and July. Weed pollen occurs at any time, however it is normally at end of June to September.²

Typical symptoms of allergic rhinitis include: ³

- Sneezing
- New continuous cough
- A runny nose
- A blocked nose
- Red and watery eyes
- Itchy nose, mouth, throat, eyes, and ears
- Loss of smell
- Pain around the temples and forehead
- Headache



Factsheet 8

Updated on 04 June 2020

Effective Inhaler Technique

Key differences between allergic rhinitis and COVID-19? 4

- One of the most useful differentiating factors between the two conditions is a fever.
- Fever would present in an infection and not allergic rhinitis.
- Palatal and Eustachian tube itch is a feature of allergic rhinitis
- Allergic rhinitis is not contagious unlike COVID-19

Allergic rhinitis symptoms tend to be milder and fluctuate depending on the time of day as pollen levels are often higher in the morning and late evening. For example, people may experience milder allergic rhinitis symptoms in wet weather since pollen is washed away. This differs with COVID-19 symptoms which do not fluctuate upon the time of day.

References

1. Symptoms of coronavirus. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>
2. When is hay fever season in the UK? Available from: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/seasonal-advice/health-wellbeing/pollen/when-is-hayfever-season>
3. Hay fever. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hay-fever/>
4. Hay fever or COVID-19: How do the symptoms differ? Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556944/>