

## Thunderstorm asthma and spring pollen survival guide

With heavy rain and severe thunderstorms currently impacting eastern parts of the country, Australians with asthma and allergies are being urged not to forget that peak spring and thunderstorm asthma season starts 1 October and lasts until the end of December.

This year, the Bureau of Meteorology is predicting that much of Australia looks set to be hit with heavy spring rainfall\*, which can lead to above average grass growth and critically, ryegrass pollen.

National Asthma Council Australia Director and respiratory physician Professor Peter Wark said people with hay fever and allergy to ryegrass pollen may be at risk of thunderstorm asthma - even if they have never had asthma symptoms before.

“People with asthma who live in, or are travelling to, a region with seasonal high grass pollen levels, should remember to take their inhaled corticosteroid ‘preventer’ medicine as prescribed by their doctor. If they are using anti-inflammatory reliever therapy, they should take their inhaler as needed. These steps offer the best protection from worsening asthma.

“If you have hay fever, the regular use of a nasal corticosteroid spray every day, at least during pollen season is the best treatment to control allergy symptoms.

“Hay fever can cause upper and lower airway inflammation and result in itchy watery eyes, runny nose and sneezing, but even more concerning, hay fever can lead to an increased risk of serious asthma flare-ups,” he said.

In 2016, those affected by the devastating epidemic thunderstorm asthma included people with asthma or a past history of asthma, those with undiagnosed asthma and also people with seasonal hay fever who had not ever had asthma.

Keris Arndt, Victoria Manager Hazard Preparedness and Response, Bureau of Meteorology said the risk this year of thunderstorm asthma in late spring/early summer is higher than normal.

“Forecast wet and warm conditions will lead to good grass and vegetation growth over the spring period and this forecast is largely driven by a negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), which is the first negative IOD event since 2016,” said Mr Arndt.

Professor Wark said the best protection is to have good control of your asthma or hay fever, and where possible avoid exposure to springtime thunderstorms and the wind gusts that come before them.

“Check grass pollen counts for your region every day during spring and early summer on high grass pollen days and avoid exposure to outdoor air when a thunderstorm is approaching, especially during wind gusts just before the rain front hits. If you can you stay indoors with your windows closed and the air conditioner off or on recirculation mode, or if driving, shut your car windows and only use recirculating air.

“Now is a great time to check in with your GP to review your Written Asthma Action Plan, check your inhaler technique and make sure you know what to do during a spring thunderstorm or asthma emergency, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Good day to day control of your asthma and the correct use of your preventer is the best protection against worsening asthma.

“The symptoms of asthma, hay fever and COVID-19 can be similar, and it can be difficult to tell the difference between them, so if you are unsure – get tested for COVID-19 and stay home until you get your results,” he said.

For easy-to-follow information on how to manage your hay fever and asthma and prepare yourself for thunderstorm asthma season explore the [National Asthma Council’s website](#).

Check the pollen forecast daily at <https://www.sensitivechoice.com/> or download the Pollen Count app here: <https://www.melbournepollen.com.au/>

*\*The [Bureau of Meteorology](#) is predicting a wet end to 2021 for the eastern half of Australia with wetter than average conditions from October until the end of December.*

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