

# Pollen and Thunderstorms



**Asthma  
Australia**

Consumer Fact Sheet

Pollen is a common asthma trigger for people who are sensitised to it (allergic). Allergic pollens are usually those of grasses, weeds and trees which are wind pollinated.

## When can pollen trigger my asthma?

Pollen is very seasonal, with both total amount of pollen and types of pollen present changing throughout the year. Pollen also varies between states and territories. The pollen seasons in each state and territory are approximately:

- Victoria, Tasmania, ACT, New South Wales: September - December
- South Australia: August - March
- Queensland: January – March
- Western Australia: July – March
- Northern Territory: May – June

Refer to [ASCIA's Pollen Calendar](#) for a guide to common plants and flowering times.

Research is also showing pollen production, atmospheric concentration, allergenicity, seasonality and dispersion is changing due to the effects of climate change.<sup>1</sup>

## How do I minimise the impact of pollen?

To minimise the impact of pollen on asthma and allergy symptoms you should;

- Take your preventer medication as prescribed to reduce the likelihood of asthma symptoms and flare-ups.
- Carry your reliever medication with you at all times, even when you are feeling well.
- Ensure your written Asthma Action Plan is up to date.

- See your doctor to make sure your asthma is well controlled and you are taking the right medications.
- Stay indoors whenever possible during peak pollen season when there are high or extreme pollen days, windy days or during thunderstorms.
- Avoid activities that will increase your exposure to pollens that you are allergic to where possible.
- Turn air conditioners to recirculate when pollen levels are high.
- If you experience hay fever symptoms, speak with your doctor or pharmacist about medications to help you manage these. Treating hay fever effectively can help improve your asthma control.

## Where can I find the pollen levels?

Depending on your state or territory, the following services provide up to date pollen counts and/or forecasts

Service	State/Territory
Aus Pollen Network	ACT, NSW, Qld, Vic
AirRater	ACT, Tas

## What is thunderstorm asthma?

Thunderstorm asthma events are thought to be triggered by an uncommon combination of high grass pollen levels and a certain type of thunderstorm, resulting in large numbers of people developing asthma symptoms over a short period of time. The largest thunderstorm asthma event occurred in Melbourne during 2016 and caused 10 deaths. Thunderstorms during low-pollen periods are unlikely to result in asthma symptoms.

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## How do I reduce my risk of thunderstorm asthma?

- Have an asthma review with your doctor to ensure you have the right medication and good asthma control, before pollen season.
- Be aware of thunderstorm asthma forecasts, particularly on high or extreme pollen count days.
- If you are prescribed a preventer medication or take a hayfever nasal spray (or both), you should be taking these 6 weeks before pollen season and continuing until pollen season finishes (although most adults with asthma need to take a preventer all year, not just in springtime).<sup>ii</sup> For example, a person with pollen allergy and asthma in Victoria would be recommend to use inhaled asthma preventer and intranasal hay fever treatment from September 1 to December 31.
- Never ignore asthma symptoms like breathlessness, wheezing and tightness in the chest. If these symptoms do occur, use your blue reliever medication as instructed. If symptoms don't improve after using your reliever, you will need to visit your doctor.

Read more here:

<https://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au/national/about-asthma/manage-your-asthma/triggers/epidemic-thunderstorm-asthma>

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<sup>i</sup> Beggs 2018, Climate change and allergy in Australia: an innovative, high-income country, at potential risk, Public Health Research and Practice.

<sup>ii</sup> National Asthma Council 2018, Preventing thunderstorm-triggered asthma in individuals, Australian Asthma Handbook.

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