

The Allergist

A newsletter from the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic

Winter 2024



Cedar Fever Season Is On Its Way

As winter comes to Oklahoma and freezes become a regular occurrence, one would think we would all be safe from allergies. However, the northern bound winds originating from Texas spread across Oklahoma carrying cedar tree pollen, in particular juniper and mountain cedar, and causing thousands of people to be miserable, especially those allergic to cedar pollen.

tization to cedar pollen. When cedar trees release a large amount of pollen, it overwhelms the body causing flu-like symptoms that can often be fast in onset. Symptoms include fatigue, sore throat, runny nose, loss of taste/smell, and itchy, watery eyes. Other symptoms can consist of a stuffy nose, plugged up ears and frequent sneezing.

These symptoms can occur between November and March. However, cedar fever most often affects people in December, January and February. Unlike other trees, cedar trees pollinate in the winter. They release their pollen after a cold front. Cedar trees are common in Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arizona, New Mexico,

Mexico and Japan. Cedar pollen has even been found across the pond in Europe!

Treatment of cedar fever can include medications such as nasal sprays and/or antihistamines. When encountering an allergy such as cedar pollen, the body reacts by releasing chemicals such as histamine as part of the allergic response. Histamine causes symptoms of itching and sneezing. Antihistamines stop or lessen the effects of these allergic reactions. Nasal antihistamine and steroid sprays can be used to help nasal congestion, sneezing, drainage and itching.



*Dr. Maya Gharfeh,
OAAC board-certified allergist*

Nasal irrigation can also help treat cedar fever. It drains out the mucus by flushing your nasal and sinus cavities with saline. There are a few ways to do nasal irrigation – a squeezed bottle, bulb syringe, a neti pot and nasal navage. These will flush out the sinuses and clean out the cedar pollen and anything else causing an irritation/allergic response.

If you are still experiencing symptoms despite the use of medications, allergen immunotherapy is another treatment option. Cedar allergen can be administered such as through an injection to help build an immunity to cedar pollen.

Prevention is an important part of addressing cedar fever. An easy option is to stay indoors to prevent exposure. Keep windows and doors closed when indoors.

Replace the filters in your car and house every 3-4 months. If you are going outside, wear a face mask, and when arriving home, take a shower to remove any pollen. Follow OAAC on social media to know when cedar

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Cedar fever is an extreme allergic response secondary to allergic sensi-

**Your friendly reminder!
If your insurance has
changed in 2024,
please go to the
patient portal and click
on "New Message" you
can attach a picture of
your insurance card.**

What is Angioedema?

Angioedema is swelling under the skin that can potentially be the cause of an allergic reaction, can happen quickly and can last for a day or two mainly affecting lips and eyes. It can often occur with hives (urticaria) for similar reasons.

Angioedema comes in several types:

Acute allergic angioedema – is an allergic reaction of something you have had contact with – eaten or taken or touched. This can also occur due to an insect or spider bite. Acute allergic angioedema happens quickly (from minutes to two hours). Hives almost always accompany acute allergic angioedema.

Drug reaction – this does not always happen as soon as the medication has been taken. The group of medications that cause the reaction called ACE inhibitors (angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors). These medications relax blood vessels to treat heart failure and may lower blood pressure. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen and naproxen can cause angioedema.

Idiopathic angioedema – has no known cause. Swelling is in the face, hands, trunk, arms and legs. This can also happen with immune system conditions and emotional issues.

Hereditary angioedema – this condition (HAE) is hereditary, coming if

one parent carries the gene or has the condition. Some have spontaneous genetic mutations that cause HAE. An estimated 1 out of 50,000 have hereditary angioedema.

Acquired C1 inhibitor deficiency – this type of angioedema is due to a C1 deficiency and is not inherited. It can affect the larynx (voice box) and result in asphyxiation (suffocation). Those with B-cell lymphoma can cause C1 inhibitor deficiency.

Vibratory angioedema – swelling is due to repeated vibrations which could happen while riding a motorcycle, running, jogging, vigorous massage or other activities.

Signs and symptoms

- Puffy or swollen face, especially eyes and mouth including lips and tongue
- Digestive problems due to swollen intestines including abdominal pain, diarrhea or nausea/vomiting
- Swollen hands, feet or genitals
- Dizziness or fainting due to blood pressure changes
- Swelling in the mouth, throat or airway making it harder to breathe and talk – these symptoms are a medical emergency. Seek help immediately.

Causes

- Food allergies – mainly milk, egg, nuts and shellfish
- Medication allergies – drugs including antibiotics like penicillin and sulfa drugs, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and contrast media used in imaging tests. Hives can also happen



with this allergic reaction.

- Venom – stinging insects and brown recluse spider bites
- Natural rubber latex – used to make gloves, balloons, condoms and catheters
- Other causes include inherited and acquired problems with C1 inhibitor protein, drug reactions not standard allergic reactions (no itchiness, no hives) and vibrational movements

Angioedema is not contagious.

Diagnosis/Testing

Make notes to tell the healthcare provider to determine what kind of angioedema it is.

- When did the swelling start?
- What has been eaten, taken or touched that might have caused the reaction?
- What medications and supplements have been taken?
- Has this type of reaction happened before?
- Did other family members have this type of swelling?

Your healthcare provider may order blood or skin tests for allergies or blood test to see if the angioedema is related to the C1 inhibitor protein.



Treatment

Treatment depends on what kind of Angioedema is diagnosed. Severe allergic reactions will require an injectable epinephrine to carry.

Allergic angioedema can be treated with antihistamines or steroids in either in oral (pill or liquid) or intravenous (in the vein) form.

Drug reactions – the healthcare provider will help find a medication to replace the one causing the reaction.

Hereditary angioedema now has various treatments to prevent and treat attacks.

Prognosis

In most instances, episodes of angioedema don't last long and will probably resolve themselves. In severe cases, treatment is needed to open the airways. Call 911 for immediate medical attention.

For more information, consult your OAAC provider.

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"The Allergist" welcomes your letters, comments or suggestions for future issues.

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Urticaria Explained

Urticaria – What is it and why does it do?

After you've read the article about angioedema, urticaria often accompanies angioedema. Also known as hives – urticaria is where red, itchy welts appear on the skin. Sometimes urticaria involves swelling.

Hives can be caused by an allergic reaction although hives can happen without any particular reason.

Usually, hives will go away in a day but sometime hives can hang on for weeks which would require a check up by a doctor.

Acute hives appear suddenly and don't last past six weeks. It can have an allergic cause.

Chronic urticaria can last longer than six weeks and come on quickly. Typically, it is not due to an allergic reaction. Hives can be uncomfortable and interfere with sleep and daily activities. If experiencing chronic urticaria, testing by a healthcare provider can determine if there is a potential cause such as autoimmune.

Symptoms

Urticaria can happen anywhere and the hives can be as small as 1 centimeter or it can spread over large areas.

- Itchiness
- Redness
- Swelling under skin with clear edges (angioedema). If swelling happens around the throat or mouth, seek medical attention immediately.
- Hives that spread into larger areas
- Disappearing and reappearing swelling
- Skin writing or dermatographism (hives coming from pressure or



scratches)

Potential Urticaria Causes

- Viral infection or illness
- Emotional stress
- Insect bites
- Animal dander
- Pollen
- Drug reactions
- Food allergies
- Autoimmune disorder
- Pressure or tight clothes
- Sweating
- Extreme heat or cold
- Sunlight
- Water
- Idiopathic (unknown)

Treating urticaria

Antihistamines such as Benadryl (diphenhydramine) or Zyrtec (cetirizine) will block the release of histamine, the molecules cells release and can lead to urticaria.

In 2014, the FDA approved a drug called Xolair for treatment of chronic urticaria.

Talk to your OAAC healthcare provider for more information about urticaria.

Flaxseed Becoming a Popular ingredient in Food; Art Supplies

Flaxseed has become an increasing popular ingredient in baked goods and other food products due to its perceived health benefits. Flaxseed has even been used as an egg substitute in recipes. Two new medically challenging cases were presented at the 2023 American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) Annual Scientific Meeting in Calif. The cases both showed that flaxseed can cause an allergic reaction after being ingested and after touching the skin.

“Flaxseed allergy has been reported in adults, but not as often as children,” said Alana Xavier De Almeida, MD, ACAAI member and lead author of “IgE Mediated Flaxseed Allergy in Non-Atopic Toddler Polysensitized to Tree Nuts but Tolerating Other Seeds.”

Dr. Xavier De Almeida is in training as an allergist.

“We saw an 18-month-old patient with a rash throughout his face and chest 20 minutes after eating a packet of oatmeal with premixed flaxseed,” she said. “This was the first time the patient had eaten flaxseed and the event self-resolved with 4 hours. A skin prick test was performed revealing positive results



for various nuts and seeds including flaxseed.”

The second medically challenging case – “Contact dermatitis of the hands caused by flaxseed in artist’s paint” involved a patient who was seen for recurrent rashes on her hands. The patient was an artist painting with oil paints. A history was obtained regarding items she used while painting including paint, charcoal, solutions to clean brushes and more. Her oil paints contained Linseed/flaxseed-based oil as to many of the oils paints artists use.

“Her hand dermatitis was severe and disrupted her painting,” said Allergist Richard Harris, MD, lead author of the paper. “She exclusively used oils to paint. We asked her to bring all items and products she used while working on her art pieces. Patch testing was done using test wells taped on the back for 48 hours. Both flaxseed oil and linseed oil are derived from the dark brown seeds of the plant *Linum Usitatissimum*. Linseed oil is used in oil paint since it speeds up drying time and reduces visibility of brush strokes. In this case, it caused severe contact dermatitis, but it also reported as an ingested allergen often seen in cereals and baked goods.”

Both cases illustrate that flaxseed, used in both food products and art supplies, should be considered as a trigger for an allergic reaction.



Time for your Flu Shot

Getting vaccinated can reduce your risk of getting sick and make your illness milder if you get vaccinated but still get sick. Vaccination may also help protect people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions. Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year for the best protection.



Flovent Discontinued: Now What?

Flovent HFA and Flovent Diskus are inhaled corticosteroid medicines used as a controller medicine to treat asthma. Flovent HFA is also used to treat eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE). Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK), the manufacturer of Flovent, discontinued production of Flovent HFA and Flovent Diskus. As part of this process, GSK is making an “authorized generic” which is the exact same medicine with the same dosing but without the branding.

Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about this change.

1. What’s the difference between the brand name Flovent inhalers and the generic fluticasone inhalers?

The authorized generic options for Flovent HFA and Flovent Diskus are the same inhaler devices and medicine (fluticasone) as found in the brand name Flovent. They work exactly the same. They just don’t have the brand label.

2. How do I know if the generic fluticasone will be covered by my insurance?

Access to the authorized generic fluticasone (active ingredient in Flovent) will depend on your health insurance and your pharmacy benefits or formulary. While we hope most insurance plans will replace the brand name Flovent with the authorized generic, there may be some that don’t. It may create delays for people to get the medicine they need.

If you are currently using brand name Flovent HFA or Flovent Diskus, check with your insurance to see if the authorized generic versions are covered. For some people, the out-of-pocket costs may unexpectedly be higher with the generic if your plan doesn’t have the authorized generics on your insurance plans preferred drug lists.



3. What do I do if I have asthma and can’t get the authorized generic fluticasone or if my insurance doesn’t cover it?

If the authorized generic is not covered by the insurance provider, you can work with the insurance company to ask for a “formulary exception” to determine if your insurance company will provide an exemption and cover the medicine.

If your insurance plan will not cover the authorized generic fluticasone and a formulary exception is not available, there are other inhaler options for the treatment of asthma.

If your prescription changes from fluticasone propionate HFA or fluticasone propionate Diskus to something else, you need to be aware of what medicine you have been prescribed and how to use it. Not all inhalers are used the same way. Some insurers are transitioning to breath-actuated inhalers (like the Diskus versions) on their preferred drug lists, but these are not appropriate for some people with asthma.

4. What do I do if I have EoE and can’t get the authorized generic fluticasone or if my insurance doesn’t cover it?

If your insurance plan will not cover the authorized generic fluticasone, call your doctor to talk about your

treatment options. Your doctor may talk with you about changing your treatment to a different medicine (budesonide) or a biologic injection called Dupixent which is approved to treat EoE.

5. What can I do now to prepare for a possible switch to the authorized generic or another medicine?

It is really important for people with asthma to continue their asthma control medicines, especially during respiratory illness season. Fluticasone works by controlling inflammation and swelling in the airways to prevent asthma attacks.

If you are currently using Flovent, you should check with your doctor or pharmacist about the best next steps for them. The authorized generic of Flovent is the exact same product without the brand label.

If you are switching to a different medicine, you should consult your doctor about appropriate dosing and also ask for training on how to administer the medicine.

If you use Flovent, you should speak with your doctor as soon as possible to determine the best course of action to continue treatment.

6. What do I do if I get a different inhaler than I’ve used before?

Not all inhalers are used the same way. Be sure you are aware of what medicine you are prescribed and ask your doctor about dosing and how to use the inhaler.

7. Why does the authorized generic cost me more? If it is the same exact

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Flovent Discontinued...

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drug, why isn't it covered by my insurance?

The authorized generic fluticasone may have higher or lower out-of-pocket costs for patients than the brand name Flovent.

The U.S. has a complicated drug pricing ecosystem. Manufacturers, pharmacy benefit managers, insurance companies, and federal policies can create situations that reduce access to critical medicines for patients.

It's not yet clear what impact this situation will have on pricing. GSK (the maker of Flovent) has released the statement below offering their perspective on this issue.

GSK statement to AAFA regarding the discontinuation of brand name Flovent

“As part of our commitment to be ambitious for patients, we launched an authorized generic for Flovent HFA (fluticasone propionate inhalation aerosol) in May 2022 and intend to launch an authorized generic for Flovent Diskus (fluticasone propionate inhalation powder) in October 2023.

These GSK manufactured authorized generics will provide patients in the US with potentially lower cost alternatives of these medically important products. We recognize that patients have a number of options in the therapeutic area and therefore remain committed to ensuring the affordability of our medicines.

Effective Jan. 1, 2024, and subsequent to the availability of these authorized generics, GSK will discontinue manufacturing branded Flovent HFA (all strengths) and branded Flovent Diskus (all strengths) for the U.S. market. It's important to

understand that the transition from branded to authorized generics will not have an impact on our ability to supply the market and we expect minimal disruption for patients.

The authorized generic version of Flovent HFA is for maintenance treatment of asthma as prophylactic therapy in adult and pediatric patients aged 4 years and older. The authorized generic contains the same medicine, in the same familiar device, and with the same instructions for use as Flovent HFA. The authorized generic may potentially be a lower cost alternative to patients, depending on their insurance coverage and benefit design.

The authorized generic version of Flovent Diskus will be for maintenance treatment of asthma as prophylactic therapy in patients aged 4 years and older. The authorized generic will contain the same medicine, in the same familiar device, with the same instructions for use as Flovent Diskus. The authorized generic may potentially be a lower cost

alternative to patients, depending on their insurance coverage and benefit design.

It's important to keep in mind that the list price is not the price most people usually pay as it does not include discounts, rebates, and other price adjustments to wholesalers or any other customer.

The authorized generics will be manufactured by GSK and distributed by Prasco LLC.”

Source: Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America

Cedar Pollen...

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tree pollen counts are high.

“While cedar fever can't be completely prevented,” said Dr. Maya Gharfeh, a board-certified allergist with the OAAC, “intense symptoms can be prevented by staying indoors and simple avoidance measures. If symptoms are not well controlled at home, contact your OAAC allergist. We would love to help.”



Remember to Follow OAAC on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram & Linked In

In addition to posting pollen and mold counts each day, OAAC also uses social media to post weather announcements and educational allergy news updates.

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