

ages, Pietz added. Indoor environmental allergies can begin in the first year of life, while outdoor environmental allergies typically do not begin until after baby's first birthday. The most common age of onset of environmental allergies for boys is 8 to 12 years old; for girls, it's not until the teen years. While allergies can develop later in life, it is less common.

That said, adult women may report that they suddenly developed allergies after giving birth or that their allergies were relieved during pregnancy. Peitz says this is likely related to the changes a woman's immune system experiences to protect the unborn baby.

Types of Allergic Reactions

Allergies—whether to pollen, pet dander, food, medication, bee stings, latex, nickel, soap, poison ivy or other allergens—all create the same immune response in affected people, referred to as an IgE reaction, Pietz explains. Environmental allergies tend to develop respiratory symptoms, Hanson adds, while food allergies manifest as diarrhea, rash and perhaps anaphylaxis. With contact allergies, the reaction is limited to a rash on only the part of the skin in direct contact with the allergen.

Some people can develop a common skin condition called eczema—an itchy, dry rash—and believe this is an allergic reaction, though the cause may be hard to pinpoint. Sometimes eczema is related to cold, dry air or another irritation, and other times, it is related to an allergy, especially to a food.

"The underlying mechanism leading to eczema, or atopic dermatitis, is believed to be a problem with the integrity of the epidermis, which is the outer layer of our skin," said Pietz, who is board-certified in family medicine. "In this condition, the epidermis doesn't act as an effective barrier, so allergens or irritants can cross through the barrier, putting into motion the IgE reaction that leads to the itchy rash classically associated with this condition."

Are Seasonal Allergies Life-Threatening?

While all allergies have the potential to develop into a possible fatal anaphylactic reaction; characterized by hives, flushing, airway swelling, trouble swallowing and sometimes shock, seasonal allergies—like other environmental allergies—typically do not lead this this type of reaction. However, seasonal allergies can rarely lead

to allergic asthma, which can become an emergency situation.

"The symptoms seen with seasonal allergies are usually referred to as allergic rhinitis," Pietz said. "These symptoms can be very bothersome and affect a person's quality of life, but the reaction will not be life-threatening."

Common Seasonal Allergies

Some people report that they didn't develop seasonal allergies until moving to a certain region or that their longtime allergies suddenly cleared up when they traveled to a different climate. Because seasonal allergies depend on the plants in the local environment, it stands to reason that allergies can develop or disappear depending on the region.

"If you go outside of the Midwest, the same plants may not be present or they may pollinate at different times of the year depending on the climate, which results in the variation of allergic symptoms based on geographic location," Pietz said.

The most common seasonal allergies in the Yankton area are: tree pollens in the spring including oak, cedar and others; grasses in late spring and early summer, and ragweed in late summer and early fall, Hanson explains. When the types of pollen are most problematic to allergy sufferers depend on each plant species' time of pollination, Pietz adds. For trees, this is the classic springtime—March through May. Grass season typically begins at the end of May, peaks during the first two weeks of June and is done by the Fourth of July. Ragweed season usually starts around Aug. 10, peaks from Aug. 20-Sept. 10 and has ended by Oct. 1.

The more troublesome days within these timeframes for seasonal allergy sufferers are those that are warm and windy, Hanson says. Symptoms will be more severe on days with higher pollen counts.

Treating Seasonal Allergies



Once an allergy has developed, there is no cure so that the person will no longer have an allergic reaction to the specific allergen. And because the risk of allergies is genetic, there is no way to prevent the development of allergies. Thankfully there are many treatments available.

ALLERGIES continued on page 6

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