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## **ALLERGY ALERT: RAIN-SOAKED CALIFORNIA RIPE FOR MASSIVE GERMINATION OF POLLEN & MOLD, SAYS CEDARS-SINAI SPECIALIST**

**LOS ANGELES (Feb. 7, 2005)** – Allergy and asthma sufferers can anticipate a higher level of symptoms this spring due to a “massive germination” of allergens expected after Southern California’s heavy rains in January, says Zab Mosenifar, M.D., director of pulmonary and critical care at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

“The last incidence like this was seven or eight years when El Nino caused heavy, extended rainfall and, as a result, a significant increase in allergy symptoms,” says Mosenifar, explaining that wet weather ensures a bumper crop of pre-existing weeds and grasses, plus new plants that take root from windborne seeds.

This makes for a “very green, lush spring” as well as increased hay fever and asthma symptoms for seasonal sufferers, he adds. The allergy season in Southern California typically runs from late February/early March through April or May.

Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) is characterized by inflammation of the mucous membranes in the nose, causing sneezing, congestion, runny nose and itchiness in the roof of the mouth, throat, eyes, nose and ears. In allergic asthma, airway passages become inflamed and swollen, making it difficult to breathe.

“While allergic rhinitis is an annoying condition, allergic asthma is more serious and can be life-threatening,” says Mosenifar.

How best to cope?

“Avoidance is No. 1 but there are limits to what you can advise,” Mosenifar explains. “You can’t tell someone to move from their home or job—that’s just not practical. A more realistic approach is to minimize exposure and to treat symptoms.”

Recommendations to ease symptoms include:

- Staying indoors, especially on windy days when airborne pollen is rampant.
- Avoiding freshly cut lawns.
- Taking mild antihistamines in non-drowsy formulations. A number of long-acting, over-the-counter medications are now available to block allergens’ effects.
- Moving your exercise routine indoors or working out before 10 a.m., prior to major pollen release.
- Taking up swimming. The air just above the water is particularly pure, and the moisture is soothing to airways.
- Making sure, if you have asthma, to take your inhaled steroids properly.
- Wearing a face mask, at least when you’re outdoors.

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“Don’t take drastic measures or significantly change your lifestyle,” Mosenifar stresses. “Instead, follow practical precautions. If you’re allergic to dander, don’t get a cat. If you already have a cat, look for reasonable solutions.”

According to Mosenifar, pollens and plant growth aren’t the only result of this year’s increased rainfall.

“Mold is a result of moisture,” he explains. “Both pollen and mold spores are found outdoors, carried by wind currents, but mold exists indoors as well. A significant number of homes in L.A. have basements that may leak or flood during heavy rains. If you end up with water in your basement, there’s a high likelihood of mold.”

Mold spores can cause allergy-like symptoms, including congestion, runny nose, cough, itchy eyes, and can aggravate asthma. Though healthy people can manage limited, temporary exposure, those with compromised immune systems, lung disease or other health problems could develop more serious symptoms or infections.

To minimize moisture and mold in your household:

- Regularly clean bathrooms, kitchens and basements and any other rooms of the house prone to moisture or mold. Use bleach to control mold on tile and other surfaces.
- Repair any leaks quickly and completely.
- In the event of flooding or a major leak, minimize exposure during cleanup by wearing gloves and eye protection. Asthma sufferers and others endangered by mold exposure should leave the premises during cleanup.
- Do not place carpeting in rooms prone to high moisture.
- Clean and replace tile grout regularly.
- Maintain home humidity levels below 60 percent by using air conditioners, dehumidifiers, kitchen/bathroom exhaust fans, crawlspace/attic vents and increased insulation.
- Check clothes dryer for proper venting.
- Choose paint with EPA-approved mold inhibitors for high-moisture areas.
- Clean and replace tile grout regularly.

And watch for Santa Ana’s healing winds, Mosenifar advises. “Usually Santa Ana’s winds will come and dry things out, getting rid of the mold. It’s very healthy—like nature’s own antidote. On the negative side they bring around new pollens from far way places which may precipitate more symptoms.”

One of only four hospitals in California whose nurses have been honored with the prestigious Magnet designation, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is one of the largest nonprofit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For 17 consecutive years, it has been named Los Angeles’ most preferred hospital for all health needs in an independent survey of area residents. Cedars-Sinai is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthroughs in biomedical research and superlative medical education. It ranks among the top 10 non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities and was recently fully accredited by the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. (AAHRPP). Additional information is available at [www.cedars-sinai.edu](http://www.cedars-sinai.edu).

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