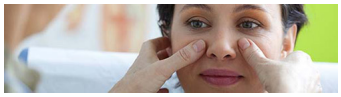
Written by By William Madaras For the Sun
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2019 season expected to be strong

Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services has partnered with the National Sinus Institute to provide McKinley County residents with a new level of relief for those who suffer from allergies and nasal congestion. RMCHCS will make the services of NSI's allergy experts available through its Gallup facilities, enabling rural residents to benefit from healthcare services locally and avoid having to travel to Albuquerque.

"Allergy season is year-round, " David Conejo, CEO of RMCHCS, said. "Different people suffer at different times of the year depending of [on] their allergy. Being a resident of a rural area like Gallup does not mean you can't receive urban style healthcare. We look forward to making NHI's pros part of our healthcare team and available to residents."

The hospital's outreach to allergy sufferers comes at a pivotal time, as the March-May blooming season of Mountain cedar and an assortment of about 70 evergreen trees and shrubs, ends. During this period the primary allergen impacting residents of McKinley County is juniper, which spreads from trees including Poplar Boxelder, Willow, Juniper and Oak, in the form of pollen. However, contributing factors can include air pollution and weather.

Area Precipitation Brings High Pollen Counts

As spring allergy season comes to an end, the May-August grass season begins with Ragweed, Curly Blue Grass, Orchardgrass, Red Fescue and others. Strong grass growth is expected from an increased seed count fostered by high levels of precipitation. This has created more pollinating plants, which will also hold true for the August-November Sagebrush season. The pollen count is expected to reach levels of 8.5 in Gallup from the areas' abundance of precipitation.

The intensity is like Ragweed, one of the strongest allergens, and can spread for many miles depending on wind. Common symptoms include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, sneezing, watery eyes, and runny nose and can trigger and aggravate asthma symptoms.

“With the wet winter and early spring, tree grasses and weeds will drive an increase in growth and pollination, so the allergy season will be quite symptomatic,” National Sinus Institute chief clinical officer Steve Harris said.

NSI operates 16 facilities across New Mexico and Texas.

Common Myths About Allergies

“Many people believe that allergies can’t be treated and you must suffer through them as a way of life. With a thoughtful approach to allergy treatment, patients can receive considerable relief,” Harris said. Harris is a member of the American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy.

Harris and RMCHCS Chief Medical Officer Dr. Valory Wangler agree that the best way to treat allergies is by avoiding contact with allergens.

“Avoidance is always a first step treatment. However, because airborne allergens are buoyant, they are very difficult to completely avoid,” Dr. Wangler said. “Minimizing outdoor exercise, or work in the yard when allergen counts are elevated is helpful.”

However, in addition to pollen, environmental allergies such as dust mites, mold and pet dander can lead to chronic and recurrent inflammation of the sinuses called sinusitis.

Untreated or incomplete treatment of allergies can contribute to asthma flare ups and formation of sino-nasal polyps causing chronic sinus headaches and nasal congestion.

“Patients with chronic sinusitis score significantly lower on quality of life measures than even those with angina, back pain, congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,” Harris said.

Popular Allergy Treatments

In the meantime, Harris identified nasal saline spray and saline sinus rinses to help remove pollen debris from the nasal airway.

“Medical treatment typically begins with an oral antihistamine such as Allegra, Zyrtec, or Claritin. Nasal steroid sprays are also very effective, but must be used daily for several days before a full benefit is received. It is also best to begin nasal steroid sprays a few weeks before the anticipated allergy season begins, and then continue through the season,” Harris said.

Harris cites the beginning of grass season around mid-May and recommends over-the-counter nasal steroid sprays such as Nasacort, Flonase, and Sensimist that could be started at the end of April. He notes that if these common solutions don’t provide relief, allergy testing would be advisable.

“For those requiring testing, you can now conveniently have blood or skin tests completed at RMCH by NSI specialists who provide both options. Once a patient’s specific allergens are identified, then immunotherapy can be discussed,” Dr. Wangler said.

Immunotherapy enables patients to receive small doses of their allergens over a period of time, which results in desensitization to them, so the immune system no longer responds inappropriately to allergens.

For more information contact: William Madaras, ***William@Glasslanternpr.com***

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