

Allergies — *Nothing to Sneeze At!*

Allergy Facts

Asthma Capitals

Fun Fact

Web Site Access and Answers

Allergies — Nothing to Sneeze At!

Watery eyes, sneezing spells, congestion — even a runny nose — are often signs of an oncoming cold. But for an estimated 50 million Americans, these common symptoms can also indicate a more pervasive problem — allergy.

The fifth leading chronic disease in the United States, allergy has been increasing in prevalence since the early 1980s across all age, sex and racial groups.

Allergies are considered diseases of the immune system or an overreaction to common substances called allergens. These substances trigger coughing, wheezing, itching and other symptoms, depending on the form of allergy.

Allergies are often grouped by triggers, time of year, or where symptoms appear on the body.

Time-of-Year Allergies

Common allergic diseases such as indoor and outdoor allergies often occur every year around the same season. The most common indoor/outdoor allergy triggers are pollen, mold spores and dust mites and often produce symptoms such as sneezing and itchy or stuffy noses.

Trigger Allergies

Food and drug allergies are characterized by itching, swelling of lips or tongue, vomiting, hives, loss of consciousness and even the severe whole-body reaction known as anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis can cause breathing difficulty or seizures and can be life-threatening.

Insect sting/bite allergies from ants, bees, hornets and other creepy-crawlers can create a number of allergic reactions like swelling, pain and anaphylaxis.

Body Allergies

Skin allergies may be chronic or recurrent and are characterized by inflammation. Allergic conjunctivitis is the most common form of allergic eye disease and causes eyes to become red and swollen and itchy. It often accompanies other allergies.

Allergies may be linked to chronic respiratory illnesses such as asthma, a condition characterized by inflammation of airways in the lungs. In some cases, asthma may be severe or fatal, accounting for more than 4,000 deaths in the United States annually.

Heredity does play a role in allergy, though people born with a genetic predisposition may not necessarily become allergic to a specific allergen.

If you suffer from allergy symptoms, talk to your doctor. Allergy tests and a complete medical history will aid your physician in diagnosing your allergy and recommending treatment. Typically, treatments will include avoiding allergens and taking medications or allergy shots.

Antihistamines and decongestants are the most common medicines used for allergies, but you should talk to your doctor before taking any prescription or non-prescription allergy medicine.

May is Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month. To learn more, ask your doctor or visit www.aafa.org.

You may also check for more information on allergies using our free online Healthcare Advisor[®] tool. Healthcare Advisor is available through AccessBlue at www.bcbsla.com. You can log in or register for AccessBlue from every page.

Healthcare Advisor is powered by Subimo, LLC, an independent company that provides healthcare information to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana customers.

Source: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America - www.aafa.org



**BlueCross BlueShield
of Louisiana**

An independent licensee of the Blue Cross
and Blue Shield Association.

www.bcbsla.com

Allergy Facts

- Allergy is the third most common chronic disease among children under 18 years old.
- More than 20 million children and adults in the United States live with asthma.
- Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism.
- Allergies account for more than 17 million outpatient office visits annually.
- Food allergies account for 30,000 visits to the emergency room each year.
- The annual cost of allergies is estimated to be nearly \$7 billion.
- Allergies are a major cause of work absenteeism, resulting in nearly 4 million missed or lost workdays each year.

Source: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America - www.aafa.org

Asthma Capitals

Knoxville may be home to sports enthusiasts and the University of Tennessee Volunteers, but it's not exactly a haven for asthma sufferers. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), Knoxville, Tenn. currently ranks as the #1 Asthma Capital™ – the most challenging place to live with asthma in the United States.

AAFA has evaluated conditions in the largest 100 metropolitan areas in America, ranking them on the quality of life for people with asthma in each city. Rankings were based on the following:

- Prevalence Factors – morbidity and mortality statistics
- Risk Factors – air quality, pollen, "100% smoke-free" laws, poverty and more
- Medical Factors – medication usage and access to specialists

The good news is Louisiana cities fared well on the list. Baton Rouge ranked number 70 on the list, followed by New Orleans at 82.

Fun Fact

Baton Rouge was named the best walking city in Louisiana in a recent study compiled by *Prevention* magazine and the American Podiatric Medical Association. The study ranked cities based on the percentage of adults who walk to work or for fitness and the number of parks per square mile. Cambridge, Mass., was listed as the best city in America for walking.

Next time you take a walk, be sure to log your steps at www.Louisiana2Step.com. It's fun, free and rewarding!

Web Site Access and Answers

Want to review your claims or pay your bills online? *AccessBlue*, Blue Cross' secure online member self-service tool, makes it easy for you to manage your account.

AccessBlue allows you to:

- Pay your bill online
- Review your claims
- Order a replacement ID card or benefit booklet
- Get your Blue Health Record, a three-year look back at all claims filed with Blue Cross or HMO Louisiana on your behalf
- Create a portable, customizable Personal Health Record.

To register for *AccessBlue*, log on to www.bcbsla.com. Click Register in the *AccessBlue* box at the upper-right hand corner of any page and follow the directions. It's easy – and it's free!



**BlueCross BlueShield
of Louisiana**

An independent licensee of the Blue Cross
and Blue Shield Association.



**HMO
Louisiana, Inc.**

A subsidiary of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana,
independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.



Have a question about healthcare?
Click on the **Answer Button** at
www.bcbsla.com.

You can also reach us by calling Customer Service at
1-800-495-BLUE or by e-mailing us at help@bcbsla.com.

5525 REITZ AVENUE • BATON ROUGE, LA 70809-3802