# Spring brings health challenges as allergies and viral infections surge in the UK



As the UK transitions into spring, many residents are indulging in outdoor activities, but this seasonal shift brings along its own set of health challenges. The Daily Mail reports on the simultaneous surge of seasonal allergies and various viral infections that often accompany this time of year, creating a complex landscape for public health.

In recent weeks, millions of Brits have been grappling with symptoms associated with hay fever, exacerbated by what are being termed 'pollen bombs.' These occur when regions experience short bursts of very high pollen counts due to the blooming of grass, trees, and flowers, as warmer temperatures entice plant life to release more pollen into the air. An interactive tool available on the Met Office website provides a five-day pollen forecast, utilising specialised instruments and weather data to predict pollen counts. For instance, while the northern regions typically experience lower pollen counts, the southern parts of the country face a more pronounced hay fever season.

Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, occurs when pollen triggers the body’s immune system, leading to the release of antibodies and symptoms including sneezing, congestion, and itchy eyes. Although there is no definitive cure, many individuals report a lessening of symptoms as they grow older. The Met Office notes that symptoms are most pronounced when pollen counts exceed 50 grains per cubic metre, with counts above 1,000 considered high.

In addition to hay fever, the UK is facing heightened instances of common viral infections this spring. Hospitalisation rates for Covid-19 reached their peak in early April, with approximately 3.7 million people reported as active carriers of the virus at any given moment, according to estimates from the Office for National Statistics. Despite a shift towards milder symptoms for many, Covid continues to exhibit characteristics that set it apart from more common seasonal illnesses. Notably, Dr Erick Eiting, vice chair of operations for emergency medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, stated, "Just about [every Covid patient] who I've seen has had really mild symptoms," distinguishing it from more severe cases seen earlier in the pandemic.

The flu virus is also prevalent during this time, often causing more severe symptoms such as fever, chills, and gastrointestinal upset. Professor Ron Eccles highlighted the difficulty in diagnosing flu versus hay fever due to overlapping symptoms and emphasised the flu's broader systemic impact, which can result in complications like pneumonia, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) poses a serious threat, especially for infants and older adults, being responsible for thousands of hospitalisations each year in the UK. Symptoms of RSV often mimic those of common cold, including nasal congestion, cough, and fatigue. Though most cases resolve without intervention, severe infections can result in complications that require medical attention.

Human metapneumovirus (HMPV), a lesser-known viral infection currently at peak season, shares symptoms with both cold and flu, highlighting the challenges in accurate diagnosis. Professor John Tregoning of Imperial College London noted that while it often presents similarly to RSV, it can also lead to more severe respiratory complications if not addressed promptly.

Amidst these viral illness concerns, two other conditions warrant attention: Strep A and Lyme disease. Group A Streptococcus can lead to a range of infections, and while most cases are mild, it can become life-threatening under certain circumstances. Health experts emphasise the importance of early detection and treatment, particularly as mild infections can escalate unexpectedly. Lyme disease, transmitted by ticks, is becoming more prevalent, with cases reportedly increasing due to expanding habitats for ticks in urban areas. A significant rise in Lyme disease cases prompts warnings about outdoor activities in environments where ticks are commonly found.

As the UK navigates this multifaceted health season, attention to symptoms and appropriate treatments remains crucial for residents aiming to maintain their well-being amid a backdrop of changing weather and increased pollen counts.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/forecast/pollen-forecast> - This URL supports the claim about pollen forecasts and their importance in predicting hay fever symptoms. The Met Office provides a five-day pollen forecast using specialized instruments and weather data.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/> - This NHS webpage explains hay fever (allergic rhinitis), describing how pollen triggers the body’s immune system and leads to symptoms like sneezing and congestion. It also mentions that there is no definitive cure but symptoms often lessen with age.
* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/research-methodology/science/articles/coronaviruscovid19/latestinsights> - This Office for National Statistics link provides insights into Covid-19 trends, which align with the mention of active virus carriers and hospitalization rates during early spring.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html> - The CDC webpage on RSV explains its impact, particularly on infants and older adults, aligning with the article's description of its symptoms and complications.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/human-metapneumovirus/> - This NHS webpage provides information on Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), highlighting its symptoms similar to cold and flu, and the challenges in accurate diagnosis.
* <https://www.publichealthengland.org.uk/strep-a> - Public Health England’s information on Strep A emphasizes early detection and treatment to prevent it from becoming life-threatening, aligning with the article’s warnings about this infection.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14604417/Is-actually-hay-fever-cities-UK-battling-pollen-bombs-signs-sniffles-one-common-spring-viruses.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data