

The sun is shining, flowers are blooming and birds are singing. But noses are running, eyes are puffy and the bugs are on the move! Not only is it Spring, but it is allergy and tick season as well.

Allergens cause uncomfortable symptoms like nasal congestion. They are common, usually harmless things, such as pollen, mold spores, animal dander (dead skin flakes and saliva), dust, foods, insect sting poison, and drugs. Allergens are what make people who have allergies sneeze, wheeze, cough or have other symptoms. Allergies are also a common trigger for asthma symptoms. Allergies are typically genetic. There isn't a cure, but there are ways to control allergies.

First, know what you are allergic to. Your health care provider can help you figure that out. People are allergic to different things. Knowing what makes your symptoms worse can help you avoid those things. Second, get medicine, if you need it. Again, your health care provider can make recommendations of over-the-counter or prescription treatment if that's what is appropriate for your symptoms. And finally, limit the allergens you are around. Here are a few tips for limiting allergens:

- Use mattress and pillow covers that block dust mites
- Wash linens and clothing in hot water
- Use a HEPA filter vacuum trigger
- Remove stuffed animals from bedrooms
- Keep bedroom windows closed to avoid pollen
- Shower and rise hair before bedtime to avoid bringing allergens to bed

Ticks can be active anytime the temperature is above freezing, so we start to notice them this time of year when we're outdoors more. Ticks can cause disease such as Lyme disease, babesiosis and anaplasmosis. Infected ticks are found throughout Massachusetts and New England, not just on Cape Cod. You can be infected from a tick in your own yard.

To prevent Lyme and other tick-borne diseases, use a bug repellent with DEET or permethrin according to the instructions on the product label. DEET products should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30 percent or less on older children. Permethrin products are intended for use on items such as clothing, shoes, and camping gear. They should not be applied to skin.

Check your body for ticks after being outside. Pay special attention to areas between the toes, back of the knees, groin, armpits, neck, along the hairline and behind the ears. Remove ticks as soon as you find them using a pair of fine point tweezers to grip the tick as close to the skin as possible. Pull straight out with steady pressure. Consult with your health care provider if you pull a tick from your body. Follow these prevention tips throughout the summer and into fall until temperatures are below freezing again.

Information adapted from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. For more details about allergies and asthma, visit www.aap.org and type allergies into the search box. For more information about tickborne disease prevention, visit www.mass.gov/dph/tick