

Allergy season blowing into Tahoe with a vengeance

By Kathryn Reed



Does that sniffing sound from friends, family members and co-workers seem louder, more constant and earlier than years past?

Allergy season is here – in the Lake Tahoe Basin, Carson Valley and seemingly everywhere else.

Physicians' offices affiliated with Barton Health have seen a 27 percent rise in allergy shots for the first quarter of this year compared to 2009.

In the first quarter of 2009, 169 cases of allergic rhinitis were diagnosed compared to 200 cases in the first three months of 2010. This is a 30 percent increase.

Allergic rhinitis is an inflammation of the nasal passages, usually associated with watery nasal discharge and itching of the nose and eyes – in other words, the basic reaction to what you are allergic to.

Reports state 20 percent of the population has allergies. They are caused by an overreaction of the body's immune system.

Veronica Scola, an allergy technician with Alpine Family Practice in South Lake Tahoe, said she started seeing people with seasonal allergy issues last month on the few warm days of April.

"I do think (allergies) are going to be much worse this year," Scola said. "It's a little bit worse than normal because of

the weather patterns.”

She said the back and forth spring-winter-spring cycle makes pollen worse.

Flora contributing to the problem includes: pines, ash, birch, juniper, alfalfa, grasses, rabbit brush and sagebrush. Trees pollinate in early spring, grasses in summer and weeds in the fall. Allergy season in the basin is from the time the snow melts until it starts to fall again.

As soon as people start raking pine needles from their lawns it stirs up components they may be allergic to.

Michelle Feeney, a family nurse practitioner with Barton Family Medicine, recommends over the counter saline irrigation to her patients.

“You get pollen on your hands, your face, you breath it in,” Feeney said. “The more important thing is to stay indoors on windy days. Wear a mask if you are really susceptible to allergies.”

She said a lot of people forget eyes are affected by allergens and they often water, get itchy and turn red. Some people think they have pink eye, when what they have is allergies.

Scola is a not a big proponent of allergy medicines. She recommends people with persistent allergies to get tested and then possibly get weekly allergy shots.

For a regional pollen report, [click here](#). The pollen hotline is (775) 359.5010, ext. 35.

For a pollen forecast by ZIP code, [click here](#).