

Tough months ahead for sufferers of seasonal allergies

Q&A

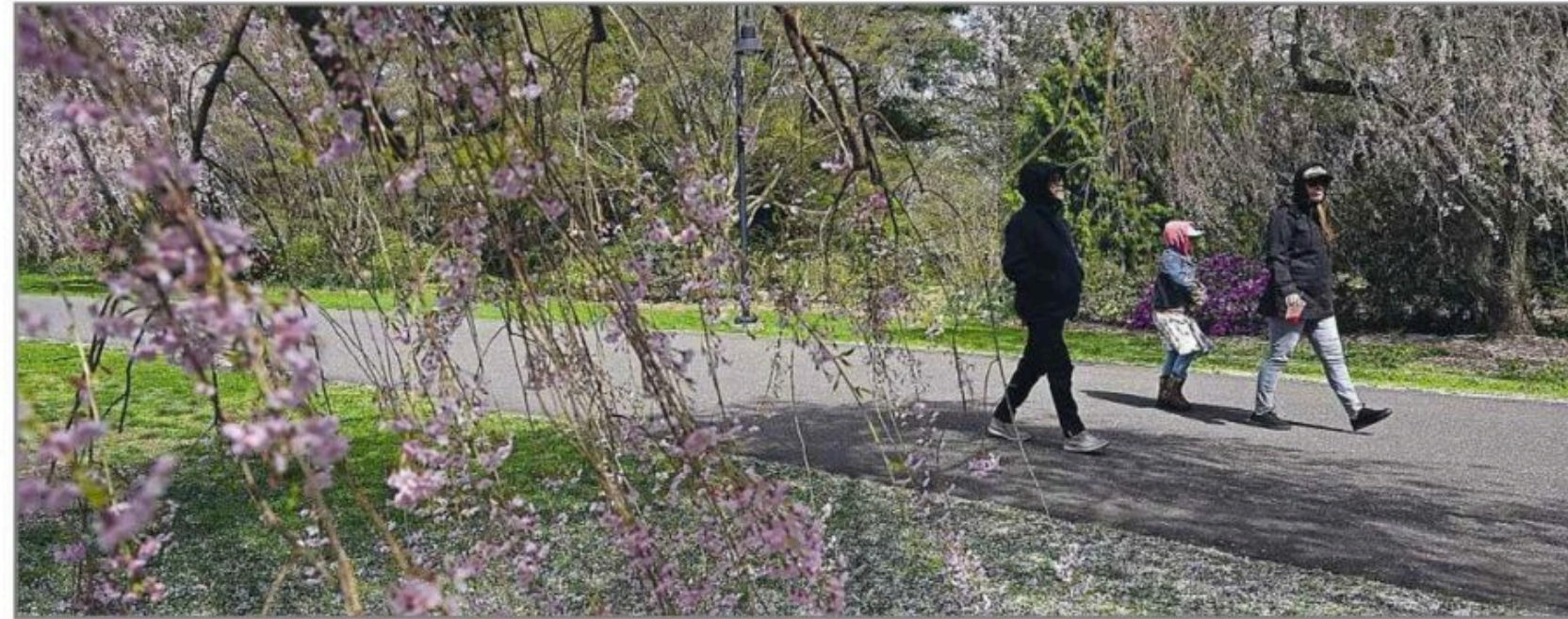
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There's still a chill in the air, but that hasn't stopped the start of allergy season. Tree pollen season starts in February, but really ramps up from the end of March into April. Allergists on Long Island and across the region said they are hearing from patients with symptoms looking for relief.

Here is what you need to know about this year's spring allergy season.

It's still March — isn't it too early for allergy season?

Over the last 30 years, growing seasons — and allergy seasons — have started earlier and lasted longer due to climate change, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Tree pollen,



Tree pollen season is in full bloom now and can last through the end of May, allergists said.

the cause of most spring allergies, is strongest between February and April. Walnut, oak, maple, cedar and ash are some of the trees that trigger allergies this time of year.

Adding to the higher pollen counts in our area, more trees are being planted, noted Dr. Marie Cavuoto Petrizzo, an allergist and immunologist with

Northwell Health who has a practice based in Manhasset.

"This is a great thing for the environment," she said. "But, of course, not great for allergy sufferers."

She said the recent rain is boosting early blooms in trees.

"I think it's going to be a long allergy season," Cavuoto Petrizzo said. "We are really

just on the upswing right now."

How long will this last?

Tree pollen allergy season starts to "settle down" toward the end of May, said Dr. Shaan Waqar, an allergist at the Plainview office of ENT and Allergy Associates. "But then the end of May is when grass season begins," he said. "It can kind of

stack up on each other that way."

For some people, their grass allergy may peak in June while for others it can extend into the summer. And then right around the corner is fall ragweed season.

"Unfortunately, a lot of patients who suffer from allergies may not just have one season," Waqar said.

Which medicines can help prevent or treat the sneezing, coughing and itchy eyes from allergies?

"For people who are prone to spring seasonal allergies, this is the time to start routine use of a nasal steroid spray," said Dr. Emily Boss, director of pediatric otolaryngology at Johns Hopkins Children's Center. "Those don't work with a single spray. They really work over time so you want to use it basically every day for a week or two, rather than just once in a while when you are feeling allergic."

Boss also said using basic

saline rinses can help flush allergens from the nasal lining. If symptoms persist, use nasal antihistamines, which sometimes work better than antihistamine pills.

What can I do other than take medicine to lower my allergy risk?

"I know this is tough because everybody loves going out in the spring," said Waqar. "But they should stay indoors when the pollen counts are high, keep your windows shut and try to prevent outdoor pollen from coming in."

Cavuoto Petrizzo said when people are outside for an extended period of time, they should shower and wash their hair after they come home.

"Believe it or not, after just being outside for 10 minutes, there is going to be tons of pollen in your hair," she said. "If you don't wash your hair and you get into bed, it's getting into your pillow."