

ISSUE 3 • MARCH 2022

HEALTHCARE SPOTLIGHT

STATE WELLNESS CENTER & PHARMACY



SPRING IS IN THE AIR

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Flowers are blooming. Bees are buzzing. Birds are chirping. Spring is in the air.

Springtime means that it's time to shed those winter coats and head outside into the warmer weather. While these outdoor activities can be fun, it can also bring about a variety of illnesses and ailments. For this month's newsletter, we are going to focus on two -- seasonal allergies and poisonous plants.



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Seasonal Allergies

If you are one of the millions of people with seasonal allergies, spring means sneezing, congestion, a runny nose, itchy eyes, and other bothersome symptoms. Seasonal allergies can make you feel awful, but before you shut yourself indoors, try these simple tips to keep those symptoms at bay.

Seasonal allergies are caused by small airborne particles (allergens) that start an immune response resulting in inflammation of the nasal passages and eyes. This inflammation causes a variety of annoying symptoms, such as a runny nose, congestion, sneezing, itchy/watery eyes, and postnasal drip. Common allergens include pollen from trees, grasses, and weeds.

Some ways to decrease exposure to potential allergens include:

- Stay indoors on dry and windy days
 - The best time to go outside is after rain when pollen levels are at their lowest.
- Remove and wash clothing after being outside
 - Avoid hanging laundry outside to dry as pollen may stick to your clothes, towels, and sheets
- Shower to rinse pollen off your skin and hair
- Wear a mask outdoors, especially when doing yard work
- Delegate yard work and other gardening activities
- Check the pollen count on your weather app or local news
 - Avoid going outdoors when pollen counts are high or wear a mask to minimize exposure to allergens
- Close windows and doors at night or when pollen counts are high

Treatment for seasonal allergies includes a variety of options available over-the-counter, including steroid nasal sprays, antihistamine nasal sprays, oral antihistamines, antihistamine eye drops, decongestants, saline nasal irrigation, and saline sprays. The best treatment will depend on your symptoms and personal preferences. Consult with your local pharmacist to determine which treatment option(s) will be best for you.

OVER-THE-COUNTER TREATMENT OPTIONS:

Steroid Nasal Sprays

- Reduces inflammation & swelling
- First-line treatment for allergy symptoms
- Best to relieve sneezing, itching, runny nose, congestion, eye symptoms, and loss of smell
- Examples: Flonase, Rhinocort, Nasacort

Antihistamines

- Blocks histamine receptors that cause the allergic response
- Relieves itching, sneezing, and runny nose
- Works best when used in combination with nasal steroids or decongestants
- Available as a tablet/capsule, nasal spray, and eye drop
- Some products (eg. Benadryl) can cause drowsiness, so use caution when driving or operating machinery
- Examples: Claritin, Zyrtec, Allegra, Benadryl, Chlor-Trimeton, Pataday, Zatidor

Decongestants

- Provides temporary relief from nasal congestion
- Available in combination with oral antihistamines
- Oral decongestants can cause an elevation in blood pressure. Do not use if you have hypertension or certain cardiovascular conditions.
- Do not use nasal spray decongestants (eg. Afrin) for more than 3 days as it can worsen congestion and can become more difficult to treat
- Examples: Sudafed, Claritin-D, Zyrtec-D, Allegra-D, Afrin





Poisonous Plants

Know Your Plants:

Poison Ivy



Can grow as a vine or small shrub trailing along the ground or climbing on low plants, trees, and poles. Each leaf has three glossy leaflets, with smooth or toothed edges. Leaves are reddish in the spring, green in summer, and yellow, orange, or red in fall. May have greenish-white flowers and whitish-yellow berries.

Poison Oak



Grows as a low shrub in the Eastern and Southern US, and in tall clumps or long vines on the Pacific Coast. Fuzzy green leaves in clusters of three are lobed or deeply toothed with rounded tips. May have yellow-white berries.

Poison Sumac



Grows as a tall shrub or small tree in bogs or swamps in the Northeast, Midwest, and parts of the Southeast. Each leaf has clusters of 7 to 13 smooth-edged leaflets. Leaves are orange in the spring, green in the summer, and yellow, orange, or red in fall. May have yellowish-green flowers and whitish-green fruits hanging in loose clusters.

If you've spent any time outdoors, there is a likely chance that you have come into contact with either poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac at some point. Most people are sensitive to the plants' oily sap called **urushiol**. This sap is present in the root, stems, leaves, and fruit of these plants. This oily resin is very sticky, and can easily attach to your skin, clothing, tools, equipment, and even your pet's fur.

If the sap comes in contact with your skin, it causes a red blistering, itchy rash that can last for multiple weeks. The rash can range from mild to severe, depending on how much sap gets on your skin and how sensitive you are to it. Most minor rashes can be treated at home without a visit to a doctor. Problems can also arise if you inhale smoke from burning plants. The sap-coated soot can enter your lungs, leading to a serious reaction.

If you have come into contact with one of these plants, it is best to wash your skin right away. You can use a degreasing soap (such as Dawn dish soap) or a specialized poison plant wash (Zanfel or Tecnu). Make sure to rinse frequently so that wash solutions do not dry on your skin and further spread the urushiol. Don't forget to scrub under your fingernails. Also wash your clothing promptly in warm, soapy water - ideally in a washing machine. Also, wash any items that came in contact with the plant oil as soon as possible since the urushiol can remain potent for many months on contaminated surfaces. Be sure to wear vinyl or cotton gloves when handling any equipment that has come in contact with urushiol.

When treating rashes caused by these plants, be sure not to scratch the blisters. Bacteria from under your fingernails can get into them and cause an infection. The rash, blisters, and itch normally resolve on their own without any treatment. You can apply wet compresses, calamine lotion, or hydrocortisone cream to the skin to reduce itching and blistering. Do not apply any creams or lotions to broken skin, such as open blisters. Oatmeal baths may also help to relieve itching. You can use an over-the-counter antihistamine (Benadryl) to help relieve itching, but be aware that it can cause drowsiness. See a healthcare provider if you start to experience a fever, the rash starts to form pus or become tender, the itching becomes worse or keeps you up at night, the rash is widespread or located on your face or genitals, or the rash is not improving. If you are suffering an allergic reaction, such as swelling or difficulty breathing, go to the emergency room.

Prevention is key! Learn how to identify poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. Try to stay on cleared pathways when hiking or engaging in other activities that might expose you to these plants. Wear socks, pants, and long sleeves when outdoors. Keep pets from running through wooded areas. Remove the plants from your yard or garden using an herbicide or pulling them out of the ground, including roots, while wearing heavy gloves.



State Wellness Center

The State Wellness Center and Pharmacy is a healthcare facility conveniently located in downtown Montgomery offering a variety of services to state and local government employees and their covered dependents ages 12 and older. Our mission is to provide a convenient, economical source of urgent care and preventative care services when you are unable to see your primary healthcare provider. Our team of medical professionals is dedicated to providing the highest quality of care and excellent service while also encouraging a continued relationship with your own personal physician.

The State Wellness Center is located at 101 South Union Street, Montgomery, AL.

State Wellness Center Services:

- Treat minor illnesses
- Provide health education & monitoring
- Share information with your physician
- Monitor efficacy & safety of every medication
- Evaluate out-of-pocket medication expense
- Provide smoking cessation & weight loss coaching
- Provide diabetes education & monitoring
- Perform anticoagulation monitoring
- Administer immunizations & injectable medications
- Develop personalized medication plans
- Monitor chronic illnesses
- Perform medication checkups
- Provide medication therapy management services
- Perform sports physicals (ages 12 & up)

Call 334-263-8470 to schedule an appointment.

Pharmacy Services:

With your SEHIP insurance, you can fill specialty drugs locally in Montgomery at SEIB pharmacy. You can pick up medications at our pharmacy or have them scheduled to be delivered to your state office in Montgomery. Whether you are just starting a specialty medication or are currently using one, we can help you!

Contact a member of our pharmacy team at 334-263-8460.

References:

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