

## Asthma and Allergy - Fast Facts

This document has been developed by [ASCIA](http://www.allergy.org.au), the peak professional body of clinical immunology/allergy specialists in Australia and New Zealand. ASCIA information is based on published literature and expert review, is not influenced by commercial organisations and is not intended to replace medical advice. For patient or carer support contact [Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia](http://www.allergy.org.au) or [Allergy New Zealand](http://www.allergy.org.au).

1. Allergy is one of the major factors associated with the development of asthma. Around 80% of people with asthma have positive allergy test results.
2. There are two main ways in which allergy plays a role in asthma:
  - Allergy itself can produce allergic inflammation in the airways.
  - Exposure to one or more allergens can trigger an asthma attack.
3. Allergy is very common in Australia and New Zealand, affecting around 20% of people. Asthma is also common, affecting around 10% of people.
4. An allergic reaction occurs when a person's immune system reacts to substances (allergens) that do not affect most people. Allergens are mostly found in house dust mites, pollen, pets, moulds, some antibiotic medicines, insect stings or bites, latex (natural rubber) and foods.
5. Allergic reactions lead to inflammation (redness and swelling), and can affect different parts of the body, such as:
  - Allergic rhinitis (hay fever) which affects the nose and eyes.
  - Eczema or urticaria (hives) which affects the skin.
  - Asthma which affects the lungs.
  - Anaphylaxis (the most severe type of allergic reaction), which can affect the whole body.
6. Asthma can also be triggered by infections, exercise, cold air, changes in temperature, and smoke.
7. For some people, pollen can directly trigger asthma as well as allergic rhinitis. When pollen granules come into contact with water, starch granules are released that are small enough to be breathed into the airways. This causes allergic rhinitis and what is known as thunderstorm asthma in some people.
8. People with asthma experience a narrowing of the airways which obstructs the flow of air in and out of the lungs. This narrowing of the airways can be reversed using medication (relievers). Most people with asthma can lead normal, active lives if they take regular medication (preventers) to control their symptoms.
9. If asthma is triggered or made worse by allergy and the specific allergen responsible is known:
  - Avoid, remove or minimise exposure to confirmed allergens, where possible.
  - Ensure that allergic rhinitis is treated, as untreated allergic rhinitis can make asthma worse.
  - Be prepared for emergency treatment of anaphylaxis if you have asthma and food allergies.
  - See a doctor if wheezing happens more in spring or summer as there may be a risk of thunderstorm asthma.

© ASCIA 2023

Content updated June 2023

For more information go to [www.allergy.org.au/patients/asthma-and-allergy](http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/asthma-and-allergy)

To support allergy and immunology research go to [www.allergyimmunology.org.au/donate](http://www.allergyimmunology.org.au/donate)