

# Pollen season off to intense early start; dry winter making it worse

By Thomas Sumner  
tsumner@thecalifornian.com

The telltale watering eyes and sniffing noses are making an early appearance this year thanks to an unseasonably high pollen count. The tree pollen levels in the air are about three times higher than the average for this time of year, according to Dr. Steven Prager of Central Coast Allergy and Asthma.

"We've had a lot more patients sick with nasal symptoms over the past few weeks," said Prager. "It's always allergy season for someone, but we've seen a definite increase in tree pollen allergies."

According to Central Coast

Allergy and Asthma, most of the pollen flying around in the air is from pine, alder, sycamore, juniper and cedar. Since trees pollinate depending on how much rain they got the previous year, a wetter wet season last year translates into an earlier and more intense allergy season this year.

Typically some tree pollen is washed away by rainwater, but a dry January and February have left plenty of pollen ready for dispersal.

"There's been nothing to keep the pollen from spreading," said Prager. "We've also been having some nice breezes lately that have been helping the pollen travel around."

Grass and weed pollen levels, though low now, are set to begin rising in the coming month or so. The strength of those allergy seasons will depend on the weather these coming weeks.

"If the weather continues to stay as it is, I expect to have a very bad weed and grass pollen season," said Prager. "But if we get late rains like we have the last few years, that may wash out the grass season and make it a little more tolerable."

For those finding the current pollen count intolerable, some simple steps will help keep sniffles in check and eyes from watering. The most obvious

See POLLEN, Page 5A

## Pollen

Continued from Page 1A

solution is to avoid pollen-saturated air by keeping your home and car windows closed; showering and changing clothes after returning home; and not hang-drying your laundry.

Some people find over-the-counter allergy medication effective, but for others a trip to

the doctor's office may be in order. For severe cases, allergy shots and allergy drops can provide permanent relief from pollen allergies.

More information about pollen allergies can be found at <http://centralcoastallergy.com>, including detailed pollen count information.

The Californian publishes allergy information on the weather page of each edition.