Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

# Allergy Facts and Figures

## What Is an Allergy?

- An allergy is when your immune system reacts to a foreign substance, called an allergen. This reaction causes specific clinical symptoms. The allergen could be something you eat, inhale into your lungs, inject into your body, or touch.
- An allergic reaction can cause coughing, sneezing, hives, rashes, itchy eyes, a runny nose, swelling, and a scratchy throat. In severe cases, it can cause low blood pressure, breathing trouble, asthma attacks, and even death if not treated promptly and appropriately.
- There is no cure for allergies. You can manage allergies with proper education, prevention, and medical treatment.
- Allergies are among the country's most common, but overlooked, diseases.

## How Common Are Allergies?

- More than 100 million people in the U.S. experience various types of allergies each year. Common examples include seasonal allergies, eczema, and food allergies.[1,2]
- Nearly 1 in 3 U.S. adults and more than 1 in 4 U.S. children have a seasonal allergy, eczema, or food allergy. [1,2]

## How Many People Seek Medical Care for Allergies?

- Allergic conditions are one of the most common health issues affecting children in the U.S.[3]
- On average, it is estimated that anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction) results in 45,000-50,000 emergency room visits in the United States each year.[4]
    - From 2008 to 2016, emergency room visits for anaphylaxis more than doubled.[4]

## How Many People Die from Allergies?

- The most common triggers for anaphylaxis are medicines, food, and insect stings.[5] Medicines cause most allergy-related deaths.[6]
- Older adults in the U.S. have the highest rates of death due to allergic reactions to medicines, food, or unknown allergens.[6]

## What Are the Costs of Allergies?

- The cost of nasal allergies is between $3 billion and $4 billion each year.[7]
- According to a 2013 analysis, caring for children with food allergies costs about $25 billion each year.[8] In 2025 dollars, this equals about $34 billion.

## What Are Indoor and Outdoor Allergies?

- Indoor and outdoor allergies can lead to sinus swelling/pain, itchy/watery eyes, runny nose, nasal congestion, and sneezing. Airborne allergens can cause seasonal (sometimes called "hay fever") or perennial (called "constant" "persistent") allergies.
- Many people with allergies often have more than one type of allergy. The most common indoor/outdoor allergy triggers are: tree pollen, grass pollen, weed pollen, mold spores, dust mites, cockroaches, cat and dog dander, and rodent dander.

## How Common Are Seasonal Allergies?

- In 2021, approximately 81 million people in the U.S. were diagnosed with seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever). This equals around 26% (67 million) of adults and 19% (14 million) of children.[1,2]
- Seasonal allergic rhinitis is an allergic reaction to pollen from trees, grasses, and weeds. This type of rhinitis occurs mainly when pollen from trees (spring), grasses (summer), and weeds (fall) are in the air.
- In 2021, non-Hispanic Black children and non-Hispanic White children were more likely to have a seasonal allergy than Hispanic and non-Hispanic Asian children.[2]
- The same triggers for indoor/outdoor allergies can also cause eye allergies (allergic conjunctivitis).

## How Common Are Skin Allergies?

Skin allergies include skin inflammation, eczema, hives, chronic hives, and contact allergies. Plants like poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac are the most common skin contact allergy triggers and cause symptoms a few days after exposure. Skin contact with metals (such as nickel), hair dyes, preservatives, fragrances, sunscreens, cockroaches and dust mites, certain foods, and/or latex may also cause skin allergy symptoms.[9]

- In 2021, around 18.9 million adults had eczema.[1]
- In 2021, 8 million children had eczema.[2]
    - Children ages 6 to 11 are most likely to have eczema.[2]
    - In 2021, non-Hispanic Black children in the U.S. were more likely to have eczema than children of other races and ethnicities.[2]
- Chronic hives affect between 1-2% of the global population.[10]
    - Chronic hives can affect up to 5% of children. [10]
    - Females are more likely to have chronic hives than males. [10]
- Contact allergies affect about 1 in 5 people.[11]
    - Females are more likely to have contact allergies than males.[11]
    - The most common causes of contact allergies are nickel, other metals (such as cobalt), certain plants (such as poison ivy, poison oaks, and poison sumac), fragrance, hair dyes, and other chemical compounds found in personal care products.[11]

## How Common Are Food Allergies?

Nine foods cause most food allergy reactions. They are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nut, fish, shellfish, wheat, soy, and sesame.

- As of 2021, about 20 million people have food allergies in the U.S.[1,2]
    - About 16 million (6.2%) U.S. adults have food allergies.[1]
    - About 4 million (5.8%) U.S. children have food allergies.[2]
- In 2021, 7.6% of non-Hispanic Black children had food allergies, compared to 5.3% of non-Hispanic White children.[2]
    - Food allergy has increased among U.S. children over the past 20 years, with the greatest increase in Black children.[12]
- Milk is the most common allergen for children, followed by egg and peanut.[13]
- Shellfish is the most common allergen for adults, followed by peanut and tree nut.[13]
- Sesame is a rising food allergy. It impacts an estimated 1 million people in the United States.[14] It was declared a major allergen in the United States in 2021.

## How Common Are Drug Allergies?

- Around 5 to 10% of adverse reactions to drugs are from allergic reactions.[15]
- Adverse drug reactions account for 3% to 6% of all hospital admissions in the United States. [16]

- The most commonly reported drug allergy is to penicillin, with up to 10% of people saying they are allergic to this type of drug. However, less than 10% of these people (or less than 1% of the total population) are actually allergic to penicillin drugs when evaluated for these allergies.[17]

## How Common Is Latex Allergy?

- About 4.3% of the general population has a latex allergy.[18]
- Latex allergy is more common in certain occupations, especially with frequent use and exposure to powdered latex gloves (such as health care and dental workers). Approximately 9.7% of health care workers have a latex allergy.[18]

## How Common Is Insect Allergy?

People who have insect allergies are often allergic to stings from bees (such as honeybees and bumble bees), wasps, yellow jackets, hornets, and ants (such as fire ants). Cockroaches and dust mites may also cause nasal or skin allergy symptoms.

- Insect sting allergies affect about 3% of the U.S. population.[19]
- In the United States between 2011 - 2021, there were a total of 788 deaths from hornet, wasp, and bee stings with an average of 72 deaths per year. Overall, 84% of these deaths occurred among males.[20]

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