South-west pollen maps: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are you/when are you creating maps for the rest of the UK?

A: These maps provide local information for the south west region of the UK only, as this work was funded by, and undertaken in collaboration with Public Health England (South West). We would like to expand this work to the rest of the UK in future and will announce any developments on this web page.

Q: Why did you choose these particular plants/trees?

A: The six plants/trees chosen (grass, alder, ash, birch, oak and pine) are all plants which are commonly allergenic (e.g. can trigger hayfever or asthma) and also ones which are prominent in the South West of the UK (the region we looked at for this study).

Q: What is pollen?

A: Pollen is made up of tiny particles which are released by plants and trees as part of their reproductive cycle. It is an extremely fine powder and is spread by insects and the wind. Pollen can cause significant irritation and inflammation in people who are allergic to it. Pollen can be inhaled by humans and animals. For those with an allergy, pollen triggers the antibody immunoglobulin E, which creates mucus and leads to symptoms such as congestion and sneezing.

Q: What is the pollen season?

A: The pollen count season is normally March to August. However, it can start as early as January and end as late as November.

The pollen season separates into three main sections:

1. Tree pollen - late March to mid-May.
2. Grass pollen - mid-May to July.
3. Weed pollen - end of June to September
Our pollen calendar has a detailed breakdown of the different types of pollen and their peak times within a season.

Q: What is the pollen calendar?

A: The pollen calendar shows an average pattern of release of the main allergenic pollen in the UK. The severity and timing of the pollen seasons will differ from year-to-year depending on the weather, biological factors and geographical location.

Q: How do these maps help me?

A: By looking at which species are most common in your location, and what time of year these are released (see the pollen calendar) you may be able to find out which species you are most sensitive to. Speak to your health professional (e.g. GP) for more detail about your own health condition.

If you already know which species you are most sensitive to, you could perhaps use these maps to self-manage your condition, along with the Met Office pollen forecast to find out when/where the pollen is likely to be at its highest levels.

Q: Who should I talk to if I am affected by pollen?

A: If you think you are, or may be, affected by pollen, speak to your pharmacist or GP.

Q: What is hayfever?

A: Hay fever (seasonal allergic rhinititis) an allergy caused by pollen grains released during the pollen season which normally runs from March to November in the UK.

Q: What are the symptoms of hayfever?

A: Common hay fever symptoms include sneezing, runny or blocked nose, itchy eyes, mouth and throat. Less common hay fever symptoms are headaches and hives.