

LONGER EXPOSURE, MORE POLLEN: CLIMATE CHANGE WORSENS ALLERGIES

The United Nations' World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has found that a shifting climate has already begun altering the production and distribution of pollen and pores.

As winter frost thaws earlier and spring weather gets warmer, plants and trees flower earlier, extending the pollen season, numerous studies have shown.

Air pollution can also increase people's sensitivity to allergens, while invasive species are spreading into new regions and causing fresh waves of allergies.

More and more people, particularly in industrialized nations, have reported developing allergy symptoms in recent decades.

Climate change affects allergy patients in multiple ways, according to a 2023 report by WMO. Rising levels of carbon dioxide, one of the main heat-trapping gases produced by burning fossil fuels, boost plant growth, in turn increasing pollen production.

Air pollution not only irritates the airways of people exposed, but it also causes stress to plants, which then produce more allergenic and irritant pollen.

In a study published in 2017, researchers projected that pollen allergies would more than double in Europe by 2041-2060 as a result of climate change, raising the number of people affected from 33 million to 77 million.

Around a quarter of adults in Europe suffer from airborne allergies, including severe asthma, while the proportion among children is 30 to 40 percent.

That figure is expected to rise to half of Europeans by 2050, according to the World Health Organization.

A Europe-wide "AutoPollen" program under development aims to provide real-time data on the distribution of pollen and fungal spores. This program will provide information on the very first pollen released into the air so that people can start taking antihistamines and other protective measures in a timely manner.