



## What you need to know about...

# Hay Fever

Hay fever, also called allergic rhinitis, causes cold-like symptoms such as runny nose, congestion, sneezing and sinus pressure. The difference between hay fever and a cold is that hay fever is not caused by a virus or infection; it is caused by an allergic response to indoor or outdoor allergens such as pollen, dust mites or pet dander. Some people have hay fever all year; other people may have hay fever that gets worse at certain times of the year, usually in the spring, summer or fall. Hay fever is one of the most common allergic conditions that affects about one in five people.

### Signs and symptoms of hay fever

Usually, the signs and symptoms of hay fever develop immediately after you are exposed to specific allergens. These can include:

- Runny nose and nasal congestion
- Watery or itchy eyes
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Itchy nose, roof of mouth or throat
- Sinus pressure and facial pain
- Swollen, blue-colored skin under your eyes

Although hay fever can start at any age, you are most likely to develop it as a child or during early adulthood. The severity of your hay fever reactions can change over the years. For most people, symptoms usually diminish slowly, often over decades.

### Is it hay fever or a cold?

Since the signs and symptoms of hay fever are so similar to those of a cold, it is important to distinguish between the two:

- If you have a runny nose with thin, watery discharge and no fever, this may be a sign of hay fever. If your runny nose has thick yellow discharge or you have a low-grade fever, this is usually a symptom of a cold or infection.

- Hay fever will occur right after exposure to allergens, but colds will develop one to three days after exposure to a virus.
- Hay fever will last for as long as you are exposed to allergens and colds go away usually in about five to seven days.

### When should I see a health care provider?

You should see your health care provider if:

- Your symptoms are ongoing and bothersome.
- Allergy medications are not working for you or cause side effects that are a problem.
- You have another condition that can worsen hay fever symptoms such as nasal polyps, asthma or frequent sinus infections.

If you seek medical advice, your health care provider will ask questions about your personal and family medical history, your signs and symptoms, and how you usually treat your allergies. He or she may also recommend allergy testing to see what you are allergic to and then come up with the best treatment plan for you.

