Oklahoma has made the list again but not necessarily a great list for bragging rights. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) recently announced its 2012 Fall Allergy Capitals™ ranking, and Oklahoma City fell from fifth to seventh and Tulsa fell from 10 to 19 out of the 100 U.S. cities - “the most challenging places to live with fall allergies.” The annual report is based on an analysis of three factors including pollen, allergy medications usage and the number of allergists per patient. See the full list at www.AllergyCapitals.com.

The Top 5 fall Allergy Capitals this year are: 1. Louisville, Kentucky, 2. Wichita, Kansas; 3. Knoxville, Tennessee; 4. Jackson, Mississippi, and 5. McAllen, Texas.

Fall is a time to enjoy beautiful colors and autumn weather outdoors. But for 40 million Americans with seasonal allergies, this time of year brings an unwelcome harvest: trillions of pollen particles travelling through the air right into your eyes, nose and mouth. Allergic rhinitis – also called nasal allergies, seasonal allergies or hay fever – is among the most common chronic diseases for children and adults, affecting more than 12 percent of the U.S. population. The primary fall allergy trigger — ragweed pollen — causes itchy runny nose, nasal congestion, repeated sneezing, watery eyes, inflamed sinuses and, in severe cases, difficulty breathing. It can be more problematic if you also have asthma.

With a little bit of planning and some good cleaning habits, you can keep your home as allergy-friendly as possible:

• Keep windows and doors closed to prevent pollen from blowing into the house.
• Control dust mites on the bed. Look for a Certified asthma & allergy friendly mattress, like the Breathe mattress from Spring Air, and wash sheets weekly in hot water (130-degrees F) to kill mites and their eggs.
• Use a quality vacuum that has a high-efficiency filter weekly to keep indoor allergens to a minimum.
• Change the air filter in your furnace regularly. Filters can trap lots of dust and allergens, so replace them every 30-90 days. Look for Certified asthma & allergy friendly filters, like Filtrete brand air filters.
• Reduce the presence of mold by decreasing moisture around the house, keeping humidity below 50 percent and clearing the yard of damp firewood and leaves.

OAAC Hits the Radio Airwaves

(Photo left) KYIS’s Jack (left) and Ron (right) thank OAAC Allergist Dr. Richard Hatch after a radio interview about the Fall allergy season. (Photo below) KBob’s Ron Spinozi from the Inzinga and Spinozi Morning Show also interviewed Dr. Hatch on why the fall allergy season was starting so early this year.

Back to School with Asthma and Allergies

School bells are ringing again all across the country. If your child has asthma and/or is allergic, you will need to fill out a medical information form concerning his or her medical conditions and what medications your child uses. It’s important to work as a team between parents, teachers and school officials, says OAAC Allergist Dr. Laura Chong.

“Talk to your child’s teacher or teachers and other relevant school personnel such as sports coaches about your child’s condition and treatment plan,” said Dr. Chong.

Maintaining a routine about medications throughout the year is also important.

“Make sure your child takes his or her allergy or asthma medications as pre-
Karen Gregory, DNP, was recently honored as the Asthma Educator of the Year by the Association of Asthma Educators (AAE). Karen received the award at the AAE National Convention held in Portland, Oregon, in August. Karen is a certified asthma educator and an advance practice nurse as well as holding a doctorate in nursing.

She is a long-standing, active member of the Association of Asthma Educators. Karen was elected to the AAE Board of Director in 2003, serving two terms. She was active on various committees including nominations and membership and co-chaired the education committee. Karen has been a contributing member of the conference committee and continues to serve on this committee. In 2004 she accepted the Secretarial position to the executive board and consequently served as Vice President. She accepted the Presidential appointment for 2010-2011. In addition to her strong leadership skills, Karen is committed to membership involvement and encouraged a unified spirit as the organization grew.

Publishing a journal has been one of the goals of the Association of Asthma Educators since the organization was founded. During her presidency, Karen Gregory made this dream happen. Working with Sage Publications and board of directors, it was through Karen’s diligence and perseverance this goal was realized. The Journal of Allergy and Asthma Education (JAAE) was launched and Karen currently serves on its editorial board.

Karen is on the Speaker’s Bureau for AAE and has shown her commitment to asthma education, advocating and encouraging certification for asthma educators as she represents AAE and also when presenting for other national and community organizations. While continuing her practice at the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic, Karen has taken a faculty position with Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Founded in 1998, the AAE serves as the premier professional organization representing health care professionals who identify themselves as asthma educators, many of whom will sit for the national asthma educator certification examination. The AAE’s primary purpose is to promote asthma education as an integral comprehensive asthma program, to raise the competence of healthcare professionals who educate individuals and families affected by asthma, and to raise the standard of care and quality of asthma education delivered to those with asthma.

**Back To School...**

(continued from page 1)

Karen Gregory, DNP, shows off her national recognition as the Asthma Educator of the Year.

Iris Shamus, a mom with a child who has multiple food allergies, was frustrated by the lack of allergy-related, kid-friendly products. She took action and created AllerMates, a line of bright, fun, whimsical character-driven wristbands, dog tags and lunch boxes that young children would happily embrace.

AllerMates features 15 characters that represent the most common allergies and kids’ health issues: asthma, peanut, nut, gluten/wheat, milk, egg, shellfish, penicillin, insect sting, latex, pollen, fish, soy, sesame and cat. AllerMates “Puffer” wristband indicates asthma and a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the “Puffer” products will be donated to asthma research.

The products are all hypo-allergenic, nickel and latex free and have passed rigorous safety standards and testing. The wristbands are adjustable and fit most children. Available seasonally at Walgreens, products can also be purchased at www.allermates.com and on Amazon.com.

If your child is at risk for life-threatening reactions, such as to food or insect stings, complete an Anaphylaxis Action Plan and show the staff how to administer autoinjectable epinephrine (epi-pen).

Talk to your OAAC allergist if your child needs a note to allow your child to take emergency medication to school.

“Starting school can be a stressful time,” said Dr. Chong. “We want to set your child up for success by having everything in place for any medical emergencies should they arise.”
You may have seen specific dog and cat breeds advertised as hypoallergenic breeds. However, contrary to popular opinion, there is no truly “hypoallergenic breed” of dogs or cats. Allergic dander in dogs and cats is not affected by length of hair or fur, nor by the amount of shedding. Proteins found in a pet’s dander, skin flakes, saliva and urine can cause an allergic reaction or aggravate asthma symptoms in some people. Pet hair or fur can collect pollen, mold spores and other outdoor allergens.

Pet allergy symptoms appear during or shortly after exposure to the animal. Symptoms may linger long after the animal is gone because the dander remains in the air, on the furniture or on your clothing.

“You may have an allergy if you have these symptoms such as sneezing, itchy eyes, runny nose and congestion after being near a pet,” said OAAC Allergist Dr. Gregory Metz. “Contact with a pet may also trigger skin allergy symptoms including itchy skin or raised, red patches. Pets can also trigger asthma symptoms, causing wheezing, difficulty breathing or chest tightness.”

If you suspect you have a pet allergy, talk to an OAAC allergist about the potential for allergy shots or immunotherapy.

“Allergy shots have a proven track record as an effective form of long-term treatment,” said Dr. Metz.

Ways to minimize pet allergy symptoms:

- Keeping pets out of the bedroom can reduce allergy symptoms since you spend about eight hours every day in this room. Keep pets off of upholstered furniture.
- Have your pet brushed regularly – outside – by someone who does not have allergies.
- Use a double or micro-filter bag in the vacuum to reduce the amount of pet allergen present in carpeting.
- Use HEPA air cleaners, which can be a big help in removing unwanted allergenic particles from the air.
- Remove carpeting and rugs, which can trap pet dander and other allergens.
- Keeping animals outside is only a temporary solution, since pet dander will eventually makes its way indoors as it is carried on clothing.
- If you do have to find a new home for your pet, it may take as long as six months or more to completely get rid of the dander.

Hypoallergenic Pets - Reality or Myth?

OAAC Welcomes Stefanie Rollins

The Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic staff welcomes Stefanie Rollins, RN, APRN-CNP. Rollins is a board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner. She has experience as a nurse practitioner both in urgent care and family practice settings. She also has more than 10 years experience as a Registered Nurse at Children’s Hospital in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. She has been a patient herself at the OAAC since 1999 and feels this personal perspective will positively impact the care she provides.

Rollins, who started at OAAC in July, said, “I am excited to be here - everyone has been so nice and welcoming. I feel blessed to be a part of such a great organization and look forward to providing comprehensive care to our allergy and asthma patients.”

Rollins graduated from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center to complete her Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing and her Master of Science degree in Nursing. She lives in Edmond with her husband, Lance, and daughter, Caylee, who is a freshman at Edmond North High School. Their son, Cody, is a freshman at Oklahoma State University. She is a member of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.
Influenza Season IS HERE!

OAAC’s Allergists encourage everyone to get their flu vaccines this fall. This is the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control:

Who should get vaccinated this season?

Everyone who is at least 6 months of age should get a flu vaccine this season. It’s especially important for some people to get vaccinated. Those people include the following:

- People who are at high risk of developing serious complications like pneumonia if they get sick with the flu should especially be vaccinated.

This includes:
- People who have certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, and chronic lung disease
- Pregnant women
- People 65 years and older
- People who live with or care for others who are high risk of developing serious complications. This includes household contacts and caregivers of people with certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, and chronic lung disease.

When should I get vaccinated?

CDC recommends that people get vaccinated against influenza as soon as 2012-2013 flu season vaccine becomes available in their community. Influenza seasons are unpredictable, and can begin as early as October. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

Why do I need a flu vaccine every year?

A flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. It’s not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. The flu vaccine is formulated each year to keep up with the flu viruses as they change.

Also, multiple studies conducted over different seasons and across vaccine types and influenza virus subtypes have shown that the body’s immunity to influenza viruses (acquired either through natural infection or vaccination) declines over time.

Getting vaccinated each year provides the best protection against influenza throughout flu season.

What sort of flu season is expected this year?

Flu seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways. Although epidemics of flu happen every year, the timing, severity, and length of the epidemic depends on many factors, including what influenza viruses are spreading, whether they match the viruses in the vaccine, and how many people get the vaccine.

When will flu activity begin and when will it peak?

The timing of flu is very unpredictable and can vary from season to season. Flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. in January or February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May. The 2011-2012 season began late and was relatively mild compared with previous seasons. It is not possible to predict how mild or severe the 2012-2013 season will be.

Will new flu viruses circulate this season?

Flu viruses are constantly changing so it’s not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year.

What flu viruses does the vaccine protect against?

Flu vaccines are designed to protect against three influenza viruses that experts predict will be the most common during the upcoming season. Three kinds of influenza viruses commonly circulate among people today: influenza B viruses, influenza A (H1N1) viruses, and influenza A (H3N2) viruses. Each year, one flu virus of each kind is used to produce seasonal influenza vaccine.

For everyone, getting vaccinated each year provides the best protection against influenza throughout flu season. It’s important to get a flu vaccine every year, even if you got vaccinated the season before and the viruses in the vaccine have not changed for the current season.

Visit with your OAAC provider about getting a flu shot.

Ragweed Allergy Season in High Swing

Ragweed pollen has many Oklahomans already suffering allergic symptoms and the OAAC has issued several high pollen alerts. The common symptoms of ragweed allergy are the same as those for other common pollen allergies such as Hayfever. These symptoms are brought on by the immune system making an abnormal over reaction to the ragweed we contact.

As previously mentioned the main ragweed allergy symptoms are those of common Hayfever and are displayed below:

- Stuffy or runny nose
- Swelling around the eyes
- Sneezing
- Irritation to the eyes
- Irritation around the nose
- Throat irritation
- Coughing and Wheezing
- As though you have a permanent cold
- Headaches and earaches
- Sinusitis
- Breathing problems if the person suffers from Asthma
- Sleep deprivation due to other symptoms
- Allergic Rhinitis which in itself is: Symptoms of a ‘permanent cold’
- Blocked stuffy nose
- Constant sore throats and postnasal drip
- Sleep disturbances and snoring
- Loss of taste and smell
- Poor concentration

Any one of these symptoms on their own may not indicate an allergic reaction to ragweed. But if you are suffering from several of these symptoms during the fall, you may be ragweed allergic and seeking relief immediately can make your life a lot easier. It is important to have this condition checked by your OAAC allergist and be treated.