The Allergist
A newsletter from the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic
Spring 2019

OKC and Tulsa 2019 Spring Allergy Capitals Rankings

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the premiere patient advocacy organization representing more than 60 million Americans with asthma and allergies, released its annual Spring Allergy Capitals™ report. The report identifies the 100 most challenging places to live with spring allergies in the U.S. McAllen, Texas, is the most challenging U.S. city to live based on higher than average pollen scores, higher-than-average medication usage and availability of board-certified allergists in the area.

The top 10 Spring Capitals for 2019 are:
1. McAllen, Texas
2. Jackson, Mississippi
3. Providence, Rhode Island
4. Memphis, Tennessee
5. Springfield, Massachusetts
6. Louisville, Kentucky
7. New Orleans, Louisiana
8. Scranton, Pennsylvania
9. Baton Rouge, Louisiana
10. Richmond, Virginia.

Last year, Oklahoma City was ranked eighth and dropped to 18th place in 2019. Tulsa was 43rd in 2018 and bottomed out to 53rd this spring.

The 2019 Spring Allergy Capitals™ research and ranking is reported by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). The ranking is based on analysis of data from the 100 most populated Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the contiguous 48 states. The three (3) individual factors analyzed for the 2018 rankings are: seasonal (Spring) pollen score, medication use (allergy) and number of allergy specialists.

For each factor, AAFA used the most recently available 12 month data. Weights are applied to each factor; factors are not weighted equally. Total scores are calculated as a composite of all three factors and cities are ranked from highest total score (city rank #1) to lowest total score (city rank #100).

“Spring allergies cause a loss of quality of life for millions of people who are miserable,” said OAAC Board-Certified Allergist Dr. Richard Hatch. “There are a variety of treatment options so people do not need to needlessly suffer in silence.”

See the full 100-city ranking at allergy-capitals.com.

OAAC announces Construction of Yukon Satellite Clinic

Patients on the western side of the greater Oklahoma City metro area will be excited to learn a new satellite clinic will be built in Yukon. According to COO Scott B. Dennis, the new clinic will have multiple medical providers serving that location. It will be more than 3,000 square feet with free on-site parking.

“We are thrilled to serve the Yukon community,” Dennis said. “We have many patients coming from the western side of the Oklahoma City area and we hope this will increase patient convenience.”

The clinic will be built along I-40 and Garth Brooks Boulevard. The official address is 1601 Health Center Parkway. The clinic is located in a medical complex directly west of the Yukon Village shopping center where Target and Hobby Lobby are located.

Members of the Yukon Chamber of Commerce congratulated OAAC during the ground-breaking ceremony on March 29. Shown are (left to right) Cheri Logan, Pam Shelton, Dr. Greg Metz, Dr. Shahan Stutes, Dr. Laura Chong, Scott Dennis, Dr. Richard Hatch, Dr. Dean Atkinson, Dr. Patricia Overhaulser, Kenny George and Judy Austin.
What to Know about Stinging Insects

When most people get stung by an insect, the sting site gets red, swells and itches. However, for those who are allergic to insect stings, their immune system overreacts to the venom in the sting. For some, a sting might be life-threatening.

The reaction – anaphylaxis – is a medical emergency and could be fatal. Symptoms might include two or more of the following – itching and hives, swelling in the throat or tongue, difficulty breathing, dizziness, stomach cramps, nausea or diarrhea. Severe cases could bring a rapid blood pressure fall resulting in shock and loss of consciousness.

“If you’ve ever had a reaction to a sting, you may be allergic,” said OAAC’s Board-Certified Allergist Dr. Dean Atkinson. “If you’ve had an anaphylactic reaction, you should ask for a referral to an allergist to learn how to stay safe in the future.”

Identifying Stinging Insects

“If you do get stung and have a reaction, pay attention to what the insect was so you can tell your allergist,” Dr. Atkinson said.

Honeybees and bumblebees only sting when provoked. Africanized honeybees also known as killer bees have been found in the Southwestern U.S. are more aggressive and may sting in swarms. Domesticated honeybees live in man-made hives. Wild honeybees live in colonies or honeycombs in hollow trees or building cavities.

Paper wasps have nests made of a paper-like material that forms a circular comb of cells which open downward. Nests are often located under eaves, behind shutters, or in shrubs or woodpiles.

Yellow jackets have nests made of a papier-mache type material and are usually underground but can also be found in frame building walls, masonry cracks or woodpiles.

Hornets are usually larger in size than yellow jackets. Their nests are gray or brown, football-shaped and made of a paper material similar to yellow jacket nests. Hornets’ nests are usually found

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New Drug Approved by FDA for Atopic Dermatitis or Asthma

Dupixentis is a new biologic medication approved by the FDA for adults with moderate to severe atopic dermatitis (AD) or asthma. It is taken by an injection every other week.

Dupixent helps prevent severe asthma attacks (exacerbations). Dupixent may also help reduce the amount of oral corticosteroids you need while preventing severe asthma attacks. Dupixent is not used to treat sudden breathing problems.

Dupixent works by blocking a type of protein called an interleukin or IL, from binding to their cell receptors. ILs contribute to a functioning immune system by helping to fight off viruses or bacteria in our bodies. When the immune systems goes haywire, it can trigger certain ILs to mistakenly attack the body, resulting in chronic inflammatory conditions such as atopic dermatitis.

Dupixent curbs the immune system over-reaction that results in atopic dermatitis. A calmed immune system leads to fewer and/or less severe symptoms.

Dupixent is approved for adults with moderate to severe AD or asthma only. Currently it is being evaluated for children with severe AD who are six months to 11 years of age and adolescents with moderate to severe AD who are 12 to 17 years of age.

Source: National Eczema Association and Dupixent’s website
Sandra Bryant is a member of the OAAC team who does the pollen counting each day and she works in the Pollen Counting Station and Extract Lab. Originally from Granite, Okla., Sandra holds an associate’s degree in Health Technology (Medical Laboratory Technician) from Sayre Junior College (now Southwestern Oklahoma State University Sayre Campus) and a bachelor’s degree in Biological Science from SWOSU.

Sandra came to OAAC five years ago after working for years in research tech positions at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation and the University of Oklahoma.

“Research dollars are harder and harder to come by,” Sandra said. “As a single parent trying to find a job with continuous funding was getting harder to do. I needed something that more stable, funding-wise, and was interested in getting back into a clinical-medical environment.”

Her OAAC career began in the extract lab.

“I then worked in the clinical lab and OSHA for a year while I was training to become certified in pollen and mold counting,” said Sandra.

After her certification training was complete, she went back to working in the extract lab and doing the pollen and mold counts. Each day, Sandra or her teammate John, go to the roof of the main office building and take the slide out of the Burkhard machine. Then back in the lab they use the microscope to count the pollen and mold spores. The count is posted on the OAAC’s website and on social media.

Sandra has two children – a son who is 24 and works in the oilfield while serving in the Oklahoma Army National Guard and a daughter who is 21 and will graduate from OU this spring. She works at one of the local TV stations as a news editor. She shared her exciting news that she is engaged and plans to be married in October. Her fiancé is a realtor in Norman, and she will gain a sweet stepson when they marry.

In Sandra’s free time, she loves antiquing, attending concerts, dining out, attending football and basketball games and to travel.

Why does she like working at OAAC?

“I enjoy the family atmosphere when life is throwing you curves,” Sandra said.

“OAAC Staff Dedicated to Community Service

These two are just a few of the charities OAAC employees support each year. For the last three years, OAAC employees have held a potluck to raise money to sponsor a child to attend Camp Cavett. Held each summer, this camp is for children with medical problems. Cavett Kids believes all kids can have the same life-changing experience regardless of their illnesses.

“Our employees care deeply about these organizations and we believe in the good work that they do,” said Lisa Byers, who serves on the OAAC events committee.

On March 2, OAAC employees participated and supported the Fight for Air Climb sponsored by the American Lung Association. The Valliance Bank hosted the climb where participants climbed the office stairs. OAAC employees raised $400 to support this cause. Across the United States, participants raised funds to support the mission of the American Lung Association while training to climb the stairs of a skyscraper, stadium, or other landmark building.

OAAC’s Annette Herrera and Shannon Hunnicutt participated in the American Lung Association Climb.
up in trees and shrubs, on gables or in tree hollows. Fire ants build nests of dirt in the ground – sometimes the nests can be 18 inches tall in the right kinds of soil.

"Preventing stings is of upmost importance," said Dr. Atkinson. "If you find a nest around your home, you should call an exterminator to have it removed."

Dr. Atkinson adds that if swelling progresses or the sting site seems infected, contact your physician.

"If you are severely insect-allergy allergic, carry auto-injectable epinephrine," Dr. Atkinson said. “Learn how to use it and keep it with you at all times. Also, some patients especially with frequent exposure to the outdoors start venom immunotherapy (allergy shots). It reduces the risk of a future severe reaction to less than 5 percent.”

Epinephrine is a rescue medication and someone will need to take you to the emergency room. Dr. Atkinson also suggests wearing a bracelet or necklace that identifies the wearer as having severe allergies.

“For those who have had a serious reaction to an insect sting, make an appointment with an allergist,” he said. “With proper testing, your allergist can diagnose your allergy and determine the best form of treatment.”

Stinging Insects...

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Insects usually sting when their homes are disturbed. If you encounter stinging insects flying around you, remain calm and move away. Avoid wearing brightly colored clothing and perfume outdoors. The smell of food attracts insects. Be extra careful when cooking, eating or drinking sweet drinks like soda or juice. Insects can crawl inside straws or canned drinks. Keep food covered until eaten. Wear closed-toe shoes outdoors and avoid going barefoot.

Treating Stings

If the insect stinger is in your skin, remove the stinger within 30 seconds to avoid receiving more venom. A quick scrape of your fingernail will remove the stinger and venom sac. Avoid squeezing the sac – this will force more venom through the stinger and into your skin.

“Raise the limb and apply a cold compress to reduce swelling and pain,” Dr. Atkinson said. “Gently clean the area with soap and water to prevent secondary infections. Don’t break any blisters. You can use topical steroid ointments or oral antihistamines to relieve the itching.”

Dr. Shahan Stutes, OAAC board-certified allergist

“For older children with food allergies,” Dr. Stutes said, “they need to be aware and carefully watch for allergens and ask about them if they are. Your child should always carry an antihistamine like Benedryl and an epinephrine auto injector and a spare.”

Speak to the kitchen staff about cross contamination. Let counselors and medical staff now what foods you child is allergic to and ask your child to let his or her friends know about allergies and are able to help.

Dr. Stutes recommends these tips for having a successful summer camp experience.

For children with asthma or food allergies, Dr. Stutes recommends that parents consider sending them to a camp that specializes in these conditions. Specialty camps have trained staffs that are knowledgeable about asthma and allergies.

Talk to your allergist before sending your child to camp to make sure prescriptions are up-to-date and your child has everything needed to treat their allergies and asthma. Your allergist can share an action plan with the camp.

Make sure the camp has information about your child’s allergies and asthma. The staff should be made aware that your asthmatic child may have difficulties doing some activities.

Talk to the medical staff about your child’s medication and find out how they handle emergencies. Check to see where the nearest hospital is and how quickly your child could get there in case of an emergency.

Summer Camp Selections for Kids with Allergies and Asthma

Even though we are in spring, it is time to start planning for your child’s summer activities.

“We want parents to be prepared for handling allergies and allergic reactions at camp,” said OAAC Board-Certified Allergist Dr. Shahan Stutes. “Additional preparation for kids who suffer from seasonal allergies, food allergies or asthma is necessary for them to prepare for time away from home.”

Dr. Shahan Stutes, OAAC board-certified allergist

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