



# OLV HEALTH & WELLNESS MINISTRY

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## Allergies

Allergies are an overreaction of the immune system to substances that do not affect other individuals. These substances, called *allergens*, can cause sneezing, coughing, and itching. The strongest risk factor for developing allergies is family history. A child is more likely to develop allergies if one or both parents have them.

An allergic reaction can occur after exposure to a number of common substances. Pollen, mold and dust may cause hay fever, which brings about sneezing, a stuffy nose and itchy eyes. Similar symptoms may occur when a person who is allergic to animal dander comes into contact with cats or dogs.

### Chain Reaction

Allergic reactions occur when the body's immune system mistakes an otherwise harmless substance for an invader. The body overreacts and goes into attack mode, releasing chemicals that bring about allergy symptoms:

- This reaction has its beginnings in the sensitization stage: An encounter with an allergen causes a change in the immune system. The body marks the allergen as dangerous and antibodies are developed to detect it.
- The immune system is now ready to react the next time exposure occurs. When the allergen enters the body, special cells are activated.
- These cells trigger the release of histamine, leukotrienes, and other chemicals, bringing about a runny, stuffy and itchy nose and throat, mucous, cough and wheezing.

### Eczema can be linked to allergies

Allergies do more than make a person sneeze and cough. They have also been associated with a chronic, itchy skin rash.

- Eczema, or atopic dermatitis, is a skin condition with symptoms including dry, itchy skin and rashes behind the knees, on the hands and feet, inside the elbows and on the face. Symptoms might change over time, as the rash flares up and then improves.
- Eczema is most common in babies and children, and a child with parents who have seasonal allergies is more likely to develop the condition. A child with eczema is more likely to develop food allergies, asthma, and hay fever.
- Certain irritants (such as soaps, cleaners, perfumes and cigarette smoke) and allergens (including dust mites, mold and pollen) can make eczema worse. A person may get contact eczema when the skin touches an allergy-causing substance.
- While there is no test to check for eczema, your doctor may recommend you be tested for allergies by a dermatologist or allergist.

**Easing eczema:** Stay away from triggers, such as scented soaps or perfumes. Use moisturizer, after a shower or bath. Soothe itchy skin with a cold compress. Choose clothing made from cotton.

References: [www.cdc.gov/cancertopics/](http://www.cdc.gov/cancertopics/). J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc., May, 2016.