

"Christmas Tree Syndrome"



If you notice that you or someone in your family has started coughing and sneezing since you put up your Christmas tree, the cause could be Christmas tree syndrome, an allergic reaction to mold spores that hang around on live trees. It causes an upper respiratory reaction and can become quite severe.

It's hard to believe a beautifully trimmed tree that fills your home with the smell of fresh pine could make your family sick, but it's not a totally uncommon occurrence.

Curious about the dramatic uptake in respiratory illnesses across all age groups around Dec. 25, a doctor asked his colleagues at a medical university to bring in clippings of pine needles and bark from the live Christmas trees they had in their homes. The results, published in the Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, revealed that 53 different kinds of mold were present on 26 samples. According to the study, most of the molds identified were allergens that can potentially trigger allergic reactions, such as wheezing, coughing and sneezing.

The longer the Christmas tree remained in the house, the higher the mold spore count. Between Dec. 24 and Jan. 6, the number of airborne mold spores increased exponentially.

What to do

If the idea of not having a Christmas tree for the holidays is inconceivable, you can take the following steps:

Thoroughly wash your tree and let it dry — outside or in the garage — before bringing it into the house. "Be careful not to leave it

outside for an extended period of time because things will start growing on it again.

Opt for an artificial Christmas tree. Wash it down or clean it using a compressed air duster, because artificial trees can also introduce dust and mold, depending on where and how they are stored.



Clean all ornaments and lights before trimming your tree; they are dust and mold magnets! After Christmas, store decorations in plastic containers that can be easily wiped down since cardboard attracts dust and mold.



Run an air purifier in the same room as the Christmas tree. It may help alleviate symptoms.

Minimize exposure. Keep a live Christmas tree in the house no more than four to seven days if you're sensitive to molds



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