**Allergies and sensitivities during seasonal changes**

**Johannesburg - Seasonal changes bring about beautiful transformations in nature, but for many individuals, they also usher in a host of allergy and sensitivity triggers. From pollen and mould to dust mites and pet dander, these allergens can cause various symptoms, whether mild discomfort or severe respiratory issues.**

In South Africa, seasonal changes can trigger allergens and sensitivities that affect individuals depending on their region and local climate. Some common symptoms to look out for include nasal congestion, sneezing, itchy, watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, wheezing, skin rashes or hives, or shortness of breath.

**Common triggers of allergic reactions and how to manage them**

1. **Pollen** is prevalent during spring and summer when plants, trees, and grasses release pollen into the air for reproduction. Common pollen allergens in South Africa include grass pollen from species such as Bermuda grass and ryegrass and tree pollen from indigenous trees like cedar, cypress, and olive trees.
* Pollen counts are typically higher on warm, dry, and windy days, so consider staying indoors during peak pollen times. Wear a pollen mask when gardening or outdoors to reduce exposure to airborne allergens.
* Keep windows closed during high pollen seasons and use air conditioning to filter indoor air.
* Remove shoes and outer clothing when entering your home to prevent indoor tracking of pollen and allergens.
1. **Mould** spores thrive in damp and humid environments, making them a common trigger for allergies, especially during the rainy season and in areas with high humidity. Indoor mould growth can occur in bathrooms, kitchens, basements, and other places with poor ventilation or water leaks.
* Use dehumidifiers to maintain indoor humidity below 50%, as mould thrives in humid environments.
* Fix leaks and address water damage promptly to prevent mould growth in your home.
1. **Dust mites** are microscopic organisms that thrive in household dust, bedding, upholstery, and carpets. Dust mite allergies can worsen during seasonal changes when increased humidity levels create favourable conditions for dust mite proliferation.
2. **Pet dander** allergies may be more evident during seasonal changes when pets shed their fur more heavily or spend more time indoors due to inclement weather. Proteins in pets' skin flakes, saliva, and urine can trigger allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.
* Consider investing in air purifiers to remove allergens from indoor air. Regularly vacuum carpets and upholstery using a vacuum cleaner to trap dust mites and pet dander.
* Wash bedding and curtains frequently in hot water to eliminate dust mites and allergens.
1. **Grasses and weeds** are abundant in South Africa, and their pollen can trigger allergies, particularly during the spring and summer. Common grass allergens include Bermuda grass, ryegrass, and Timothy grass, while common weed allergens include ragweed and pigweed.
2. **Insect stings** from bees, wasps, and ants can cause allergic reactions in susceptible individuals. Insect activity may increase during warmer months, making allergic reactions to insect stings more common during seasonal changes.
3. **Food** allergies are not exclusively seasonal, but certain foods may be more prevalent or consumed more frequently during specific seasons, leading to increased exposure and potential allergic reactions. Examples of seasonal foods that may trigger allergies include certain fruits and vegetables such as mangoes, strawberries, tomatoes, or cucumbers harvested during particular times of the year.
* Over-the-counter antihistamines, decongestants, and nasal sprays can relieve allergy symptoms. Consult your healthcare provider or pharmacist for recommendations on suitable medications.
* Allergy shots (immunotherapy) may be recommended for individuals with severe allergies to help desensitise the immune system over time.
* If allergy symptoms persist despite taking preventive measures and over-the-counter medications, consult an allergist or immunologist for a comprehensive evaluation and personalised treatment plan.

**Stay informed for better management**

Seasonal changes can be challenging for individuals with allergies and sensitivities. Still, with proper management strategies and proactive measures, it is possible to minimise symptoms and enjoy the beauty of each season.

Staying informed, implementing allergy-proofing techniques, and seeking professional guidance can help individuals take control of their allergies and sensitivities, leading healthier, more comfortable lives year-round. It's essential to be aware of potential triggers during seasonal changes and take proactive measures to minimise exposure, such as staying indoors during high pollen or mould spore counts, using air purifiers, regularly cleaning and vacuuming, and avoiding known allergens.

Consulting with a healthcare provider or allergist for personalised advice and treatment options can also help manage symptoms and improve the quality of life for individuals with seasonal allergies and sensitivities. Before undergoing immunotherapy for allergies, confirm whether your medical scheme and Medshield benefit option cover such treatment to avoid incurring costs.

**FIN**

(754 words)

**EDITORS NOTES**

**FURTHER MEDIA INFORMATION AND INTERVIEW REQUESTS**

* Stone issues this release on behalf of the Medshield Medical Scheme.
* For media enquiries or interview requests, please contact Willem Eksteen, CEO of Stone or a media liaison member of the Stone team at media@stone.consulting / 011 447 0168
* Alternatively, contact Lilané Swanepoel at Medshield at 010 597 4982 / lilanes@medshield.co.za

**MORE INFORMATION ON THE 2024 MEDSHIELD BENEFIT OPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Benefits and Contribution amendments are subject to CMS approval.

Please refer to the 2024 Product Page on the Medshield website at <https://medshield.co.za/>. You can review the benefit adjustments and value adds and download the 2024 benefit guides

* **PremiumPlus** provides mature families and professionals with unlimited hospital cover in a hospital of their choice, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at 200% Medshield Private Tariff, and the freedom to manage daily healthcare expenses through a comprehensive Personal Savings Account and extended Above Threshold Cover.
* **MediBonus** provides mature families and professionals with unlimited hospital cover in a hospital of their choice, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at 200% Medshield Private Tariff, and the independence to manage daily healthcare expenses through a substantial Day-to-Day Limit.
* **MediSaver** is perfect for independent individuals and young professionals thinking about expanding their families. MediSaver offers unlimited hospital cover in the Compact Hospital Network, with the freedom to manage daily healthcare expenses through a generous Personal Savings Account.
* **MediPlus** provides middle to upper-income families with complete healthcare cover for major medical and daily healthcare needs. Unlimited hospital cover is provided through a choice of two hospital networks, Prime or the value-focused Compact Hospital Network. Daily healthcare expenses are covered through a generous Day-to-Day Limit. Benefits are identical in both categories, Prime and Compact, with care coordination and doctor referral mandated on MediPlus Compact.
* **MediCore** is ideal for healthy individuals looking for comprehensive hospital cover, with daily healthcare expenses self-managed. This option offers unlimited hospital cover in the Compact Hospital Network, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at Medshield Private Tariff 200%. Day-to-day healthcare expenses are self-funded.
* **MediValue - Prime and Compact** - is the ideal option for growing families. It offers affordable cover for major medical and daily healthcare needs. Unlimited hospital cover is provided through a choice of two hospital networks, Prime or the value-focused Compact Hospital Network. Daily healthcare expenses are covered through a sizeable Day-to-Day Limit. Benefits are identical on both options, MediValue Prime and MediValue Compact, with care coordination and doctor referral mandated on MediValue Compact.
* **MediSwift** is the ideal hospital plan for active, healthy individuals. Major medical emergency and In-Hospital treatment are covered up to R1 million per family in the Compact Hospital Network, with the added benefit of day-to-day treatment for non-professional sports injuries. As a hospital plan, MediSwift offers no Day-to-Day benefits, allowing members the freedom to self-manage their daily healthcare expenses.

**Medshield Medical Scheme - Live Assured knowing you have a Partner for Life.**

**ABOUT MEDSHIELD MEDICAL SCHEME**

* Medshield is a healthcare fund where all members contribute towards the fund monthly to cater for medical cover should the need arise.
* Medshield has been in operation since 1968, making us one of the most experienced, knowledgeable, and reliable medical schemes in South Africa. Our extensive experience in the healthcare sector guides our understanding of our members' needs. Our excellent cover and benefits combined with the best quality systems and services have resulted in our exceptional size and strength.
* Each of our options offers affordably priced benefits. We continuously review and improve the range of benefits in each option to bring you what you need.
* Our impeccable reputation of prompt payments to hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and other medical caregivers guarantees approval from service providers when you present your Medshield membership card.
* Our extensive partner networks place us in the perfect position to offer exceptionally competitive rates to our members.
* Medshield is well-represented throughout all nine provinces and provides seamless access to service providers in your area. Our geographical spread provides convenience if it becomes necessary for you to have a personal discussion with one of our experienced consultants. We also have a streamlined online claim submission system and immediate contact centre assistance, making it easier to manage your membership and claims from the convenience of your home or office.
* Our extensive range of additional benefits and services is another distinguishing factor. Our benefits and services have been designed to give members additional support when they need it most, for instance, in an emergency or when suffering from a chronic or life-threatening condition.
* Compared with other medical schemes, our trustworthiness, impeccable history, and exceptional service guarantee that we come out tops!