

# Hold that tissue: Allergy help may be on the way

February 13 2009, by Michael Bernstein

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Image: Janali Thompson, American Chemical Society

It isn't beach weather in most of the United States right now, but it's never too early to be thinking about spring and summer. Unfortunately, for people with allergies, today's daydreams can turn into nightmares about sneezing, red eyes and a runny nose. But help may be on the way!

Chemists in Germany have developed a way to tell people with allergies exactly what kind of pollen is in the air, instantly, and how much there is flying around. So how would this help?

You check your outdoor thermometer to see how hot or cold it is so you will know what clothes to wear, right? And you check the weather

forecast to know whether to carry an umbrella, too, right? What if you could find out what kind of pollen is in the air at any time?

The new test will tell people with allergies if levels are high for the types of pollen that bother them, so they can stay indoors as much as possible or be sure to take their allergy medicine in the morning before going out. Knowing accurate pollen information quickly also can help you plan your day. If levels of a kind of pollen that bothers you are high, for example, you would know not to go on a picnic or play baseball that day. If they're low, put on your bathing suit!

Study leader Janina Kneipp says that the test used today is done with a device like a vacuum cleaner with sticky tape inside. The chemist takes out the sticky tape and looks at it under a microscope. The pollen from different trees has different shapes, and this is how they can tell which kinds of pollen are in the air.

In the new, faster test, chemists shine a laser on the pollen, which has been caught in a trap outdoors. The laser light immediately changes color a tiny bit for each kind of pollen. Researchers then use a computer to tell if it's oak or birch or ragweed or something else in the air. It takes just seconds for a computer to tell what kind of pollen it is. This is much faster than the under-the-microscope process.

Provided by American Chemical Society

Citation: Hold that tissue: Allergy help may be on the way (2009, February 13) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-02-tissue-allergy.html>

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