

Leading Allergists discuss solutions to alleviate the Allergy burden in India

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Indian College of Allergy ,Asthma, and Applied Immunology organizes the 4-day (January 28 - 31, 2016) 49th National Conference of Indian College of Allergy, Asthma & Applied Immunology 'ICAAICON-2015' at Saveetha Medical College and Hospital to bring together 300 national and international allergy experts under one roof for discussion on prevalence, trends and latest advances in Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. World Allergy Organisation (WAO) states that an estimated 25 percent of the global population suffers from allergic and immunologic diseases such as bronchial asthma, allergic rhinitis, atopic dermatitis and eczema etc. It is estimated that every fourth Indian suffers from some kind of allergy once in their lifetime.

Commenting on the allergy trend in India, Dr A B Singh, Emeritus Scientist(Ex) , Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, Delhi, and Secretary of Indian College of Allergy ,Asthma and Applied Immunology said, "Top allergies observed in India are that of respiratory, skin, food and dust mites. About 20-30 percent of India's population suffers from at least one of the allergic diseases. 80 percent of allergy cases in India are hereditary. Dr A B Singh also spoke of his observation on pollen allergy trend - "Pollen allergens from trees, grasses, flowers and weeds cause respiratory allergies in 20 percent of the India's allergic population. The trend increases at the onset of spring and autumn." Dr Singh has identified important pollen allergens of the country as a result of more than 30years of experience in research.

Allergies are an over-reaction of the immune system in the form of antibodies to exposed proteins which are not necessarily harmful. These antibodies cause an allergic reaction which cause symptoms in the nose, lungs, throat, sinuses, ears, lining of the stomach or on the skin. Some symptoms include incessant sneezing, runny nose (rhinitis), difficulty breathing, hives and dermatitis. Allergies if undiagnosed or ill-managed may culminate to persistent allergic rhinitis and severe asthma.

Stating the increase of Allergies in Chennai, Dr K Nagaraju, Organising Secretary and Allergist at Apollo Children's Hospital, Chennai said, "In the past years, there has been an ~15-20 percent increase of allergy incidence in Chennai. House dust mites (~50 percent) is the leading allergen in Chennai followed by pollen (23 percent), insect (16 percent) and food (1-5

percent) allergens. Allergic rhinitis is prevalent in about 42 percent of people between 20 -40 years. Prevalence of coexisting allergic rhinitis and asthma is highest amongst children & young adults (5- 20 years) at 45 percent prevalence."

Highlighting the need for allergy management through accurate diagnosis and treatment, Dr S N Gaur, Head of Pulmonary Medicine, Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute (VPCI), Delhi said, "In India, allergies are not considered to be a serious health concern due to low awareness of the causes and the impact. About 40 percent of people with allergic rhinitis develop asthma at some stage in life and about 80% asthmatics suffer from allergic rhinitis.[2] Timely, accurate diagnose allergies is important for appropriate allergy management to prevent future complications. Skin prick test is the global, gold standard method of allergy diagnosis as it is quick, convenient, cost-effective and can be used from infancy to old age.[1] Anti-allergic drugs provide temporary relief without treating the root cause and its prolonged use causes side-effects such as sleep disturbances and obesity. Allergen Immunotherapy is the recommended treatment for allergies since it is the closest attempt towards allergy cure."