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AUTUMN MITE TRIGGERS ASTHMA

As the leaves fall, the dust mite population in your bedroom could well be on the rise.

Research from Sydney's Woolcock Institute of Medical Research shows that dust mite levels can increase 2-3 fold during late autumn, compared with summer levels.¹

According to National Asthma Council Australia director, Dr Janet Rimmer, a respiratory physician and allergist, that's bad news for the vast numbers of Aussies with dust-mite triggered allergy or asthma.

She said: "Around 45 per cent of the population have an allergy and of those people, almost 80 per cent react to dust mites.

"Dust mites are the most common trigger for asthma in Australia and the bedroom is the site of the greatest exposure."

House dust mites are microscopic creatures that feed off human skin scales.

They are mostly found in the home and live in soft furnishings such as beds, bedding, carpets, upholstered furniture, soft toys and clothing.

Dust mites thrive in temperate and humid climates and the research indicates a link between the change of weather and the dust mite population explosion, which appears to occur approximately two months after a damp, humid Autumnal spell.

For people with dust mite triggered allergy or asthma, Dr Rimmer recommends a number of dust mite avoidance measures, which may take time, but are potentially helpful.

Typical control measures include washing sheets and pillow cases weekly in water hotter than 55°C; covering mattress, pillow and quilt with dust mite resistant covers, which must be washed every two months; removing soft toys or hot washing them weekly or freezing them overnight; dusting hard floors and surfaces with a damp or electrostatic cloth; and, cleaning carpets weekly using a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.

"Dust mites and the allergen they leave behind are extremely hard to eliminate, but people who are strenuously motivated to remove the allergen from their homes do say that it makes a difference," Dr Rimmer said.

¹ D. Crisafulli, C. Almqvist, G. Marks, E. Tovey (2007) Seasonal trends in house dust mite allergen in children's beds over a 7-year period *Allergy* 62 (12) , 1394–1400

“It’s important to remember that dust mite allergy is a perennial problem and dust mite control measures need to be adhered to year round – not just in Autumn,” she warned.

Comprehensive dust mite control advice can be found on the National Asthma Council Australia website: www.NationalAsthma.com.au

For further information, please contact:

Kelly Ward,
Ward Communications Pty Ltd
T. 03 9744 1855;
M. 0407 860 834;
E. kward@wardcom.com.au