

Australia identifies way to prevent hay fever and thunderstorm asthma

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Grass pollen allergy is the leading cause of seasonal asthma and hay fever globally with up to 30 per cent of the world's population allergic to grass pollen allergens

In a discovery that may help scientists alleviate the global burden of grass pollen allergens, Monash researchers in Australia have found that sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) with a small tablet containing grass pollens, changed patient's immune memory cells in unexpected ways.

An allergy to grass pollens is more than a stuffed nose. It can mean time off from work or school, anxiety in parks and is the underlying cause of thunder-storm asthma.

According to lead researcher, Professor Menno van Zelm, from the Monash University Central Clinical School, recent studies from his lab have shown that sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) against grass pollen allergy is known to protect against thunderstorm asthma and can protect against hay fever during the pollen season.

He said, "Until now, we've had little understanding of how the immune system is stimulated by SLIT to provide protection against allergens. Understanding these processes is key to developing new treatments and for producing ways to test whether these new treatments are working, by finding biomarkers of immunity."

Allergen immunotherapy is a lengthy procedure, taking 3-5 years for sustained effects, so early markers of success are urgently needed to ensure that the right patients receive the optimal treatment as quickly as possible.