Spring breezes trigger sneezes for many

For students unfamiliar with spring in Minnesota, what may be our loveliest season may bring unexpected allergy symptoms. When trees, weeds and grasses send pollen into the air, it enters our noses and throats, causing a runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes and throat, and coughing. Allergic rhinitis caused by pollen, also called "seasonal allergic rhinitis," affects approximately 7 percent of adults in the United States.

At times, it’s difficult to tell whether the ailment is a common cold or seasonal allergies. According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a fever suggests a cold rather than an allergy, and symptoms lasting more than two weeks suggest allergies rather than a cold.

Many people manage their symptoms with medications, allergy shots, or by trying to avoid exposure to pollens that bring on symptoms. Paying attention to the pollen count, often reported by local weather broadcasts or online, can be a helpful way of knowing how much pollen is in the air on a given day. Pollen counts tend to be highest early in the morning on warm, dry, breezy days and lowest during chilly, wet periods.

There is some good evidence that nasal saline irrigation (putting salt water into one nostril and draining it out the other) with a neti pot or other rinsing device can help relieve allergy symptoms. While it is generally safe, it is important to use and clean your neti pot according to instructions from your health care provider. Neti pots with 30 saline packets are always available at SHAC for $10. Our medical providers are happy to see you to discuss this and other options for allergy care.

Sources: National Institutes of Health: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health; National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Graduating? Don’t forget your immunization record!

With all the preparations for graduation, you probably wouldn’t put gathering medical records at the top of your to-do list. But it’s worth a few moments of your time to make sure you have a copy of your immunization record before you begin the next stage of your life journey.

Whether you’re planning to head off to graduate school, travel to distant lands, or start your career, you will likely need to have documentation of your immunization history. It’s easy to get that documentation from SHAC before you leave campus.

When you submitted your immunization record as a first-year student, SHAC uploaded it into your electronic health record. You also likely entered dates of vaccination. Be sure to go to mySHAC (https://go.carleton.edu/mySHAC) and add any vaccines received during your time here so you have a complete list ready for printing. For a copy of your original documentation, just stop in at SHAC and ask us to print it out for you. Keep it in a safe place and never give away your last copy. Happy Trails!
Updates to mySHAC Portal make managing health care easier

The mySHAC Patient Portal is where students can log into their personal, secure electronic health record to schedule and cancel medical appointments, send secure messages to providers, complete forms, and manage their immunization information. A number of improvements were made to the mySHAC Portal during Winter 2016.

They include:
• revised appointment search functionality which has allowed us to almost double the number of medical appointments available for online scheduling;
• a user-friendly Home screen, replacing the clunky text layout with easily-navigated icons;
• highly visible reminders to complete e-forms that are required prior to visits (look for the green button under appointments!);
• improved secure messaging featuring closed envelope icons next to unread messages. Remember, it’s important to read all Secure Messages as they may contain important and time-sensitive information regarding your health care!

Care Navigation services now offered at SHAC

SHAC is able to take care of more than 90% of the medical concerns that students bring to our door. Occasionally, however, students do need to seek care at a local hospital or clinic. Understandably, many students have relied on a parent or guardian in the past to help them arrange and pay for that care. This may mean navigating the unfamiliar world of health care and insurance for the first time.

For the past year, SHAC has had a dedicated care navigator. Jan Foley, our Medical Administrative Assistant, regularly meets with students who need help with insurance claims, medical bills, and scheduling simple appointments off-campus. Jan assists students with phone calls to insurance companies, patient accounts offices, area health care facilities, and the local taxi service. This guidance helps students learn tools for managing their health care independently in the future. To make an appointment to meet with Jan, call SHAC at 507-222-4080.

There’s an app for that!

While technology often heightens our stress levels with information overload, it can also be a tool that helps us relax. For this year’s Winter Health Fair, SHAC created “Calm Kits” for use by our students. They included, among other things, a worry stone, a couple of mandala postcards to color and mail to friends or family, chamomile tea, and this listing of free apps for relaxation. Check them out and find one that works for you!