

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services



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PROTECTING VICTORIANS FROM THUNDERSTORM ASTHMA

The Andrews Labor Government is launching its world-class thunderstorm asthma monitoring, prediction and alert system for 2022 to ensure Victorians are notified of high-risk events this pollen season.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today announced that the *Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma Risk Forecasting System* will recommence on 1 October, so people at increased risk – such as those with asthma or hay fever – can take action to avoid exposure to the pollen fragments that can trigger asthma.

Grass pollen season, which typically runs from the start of October until the end of December, brings with it a seasonal increase in asthma and hay fever and the chance of thunderstorm asthma.

When large numbers of people develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time, caused by high amounts of grass pollen and a certain type of thunderstorm, it is known as epidemic thunderstorm asthma.

The forecasting system, which will operate until 31 December, forecasts three days in advance and provides a low (green), moderate (orange) or high (red) risk forecast across the nine Victorian weather districts.

On high-risk thunderstorm asthma risk forecast days, people with asthma or spring hay fever can reduce their risk by avoiding the storms. On these days, at-risk people should go inside, close windows and turn off any air conditioners that bring air and possible pollen fragments in from outside.

Melbourne experienced the world's largest epidemic thunderstorm asthma event on 21 November 2016, which resulted in 10 tragic deaths and thousands of people developing breathing difficulties in a very short period.

Those at risk should check the epidemic thunderstorm asthma risk forecast daily at emergency.vic.gov.au/respond or download the app and set up a watch zone.

For more information on thunderstorm asthma visit betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstorm-asthma

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"This forecasting system will help ensure people at risk during grass pollen season are aware of high-risk days and can take the right actions to protect themselves and their loved ones."

"I encourage all Victorians who may have asthma or seasonal hay fever to download the VicEmergency app and set up a watch zone, so they are alerted on a high-risk day."

"People with asthma should take their asthma medication regularly as directed and see their GP if they have ongoing symptoms, update their asthma plan yearly, and learn asthma first aid."