

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services



Friday, 3 October 2025

PROTECTING VICTORIANS FROM THUNDERSTORM ASTHMA

Six new automated pollen counters will be part of an expanded and more sophisticated thunderstorm asthma risk forecasting system in 2025, keeping Victorians safer on high-risk days this grass pollen season.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today visited the State Control Centre to encourage Victorians to be prepared by using Victoria's world-leading Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma Risk Forecast System, now available online until 31 December.

Replacing manual traps, the new automated pollen counters use advanced imaging to deliver faster and more accurate data – giving Victoria a nation leading tool to strengthen forecasting and health alerts.

Providing a three-day forecast for Victoria's nine weather districts, the system will indicate a low, moderate or high risk – alerting people when they should avoid exposure outdoors to reduce demand on emergency services.

Thunderstorm asthma typically occurs between October and December when certain thunderstorms cause grass pollen grains to burst into tiny particles, which can be inhaled deep into the lungs and trigger asthma symptoms.

Those most at risk are encouraged to take any prescribed medication, follow their asthma action plan and be alert on higher-risk forecast days – closing windows and avoiding outdoor exposure during wind gusts and storms.

The launch of the forecast system in 2017 followed the world's largest epidemic thunderstorm asthma event in Melbourne on 21 November 2016, that tragically resulted in 10 deaths and thousands of people developing breathing difficulties in a very short time.

The new pollen counters are part of a joint investment with the Allan Labor Government investing \$2.97 million to deliver the modernised system – supported by a \$2.4 million contribution from the Albanese Labor Government through the Disaster Ready Fund which includes funding for a further three pollen counters in ACT, NSW and SA.

To access the daily forecasts and health advice, visit the betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstorm-asthma or the emergency.vic.gov.au.

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"We want everyone to stay safe this pollen season, and with these high-tech upgrades, more Victorians can now stay informed and put their asthma action plans in place on high risk days."

Quote attributable to Federal Minister for Emergency Management Kristy McBain

"Through our government's flagship Disaster Ready Fund, we're proud to support jurisdictions like Victoria to minimise the risk of thunderstorms for asthmatics through earlier warnings in time for the higher-risk weather season."

Quote attributable to the Victorian Chief Health Officer Caroline McElroy

"People with asthma or hay fever can reduce their risk by avoiding being outdoors during thunderstorms, particularly the wind gusts that come before them. Check the VicEmergency app and plan ahead."

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