Not just a cold

Doctors warn of growing spring allergy wave in Bahrain

- **Outdoor workers face higher exposure risks**
- **Misdiagnosed "summer colds" delay proper treatment**
- **Children, asthma patients among high-risk groups**

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Bahrain is experiencing a familiar seasonal shift, with some residents noticing an uptick in sneezing, watery eyes, eczema flare-ups, and mild respiratory irritation — symptoms commonly linked to spring allergies.

Speaking to ***The Daily Tribune***, Dr Eman Al-Asoomi, a family physician, noted that while allergies are often viewed as a minor nuisance, they can significantly affect sleep, productivity, and overall quality of life for many individuals.

"Currently, the region is entering a peak period where rising temperatures, pollen release from date palms and flowering plants, and recurring dust storms combine to create a high load of airborne irritants. This allergy season is expected to intensify over the coming weeks and may extend into early summer," she said.

She added that there has been a noticeable uptick in allergy-related complaints over the past four to six weeks, consistent with seasonal patterns as Bahrain transitions from mild winter to warmer spring conditions.

"Patients are presenting more often with nasal congestion, sneezing, itchy eyes, and dry cough — symptoms that are often mistaken for a mild viral illness but typically persist without fever. A key challenge is that many patients attribute these symptoms to a recurrent 'summer cold' and delay seeking care until complications such as sinusitis, sleep disturbance, or worsening of underlying conditions develop."

> **Many patients mistake allergy symptoms for a mild cold and delay proper treatment**
>
> DR EMAN AL-ASOOMI

> **Patients prone to allergies may experience stronger reactions during this period**
>
> DR JALAL ABDULLAH KALAM

PREVENTIVE CARE

Both doctors emphasised that consistent preventive measures can significantly reduce symptom burden during the allergy season.

They advised patients to take practical steps at home and outdoors. At home, this includes keeping windows closed during peak pollen hours — such as early morning and late afternoon — and during dust storms; using HEPA air purifiers in bedrooms; vacuuming with HEPA filters twice a week; damp-dusting regularly; washing bed linens in hot water weekly; and removing shoes at the door and showering before bed to reduce allergen exposure.

Outdoors, they recommend wearing sunglasses and masks on windy or dusty days, avoiding early morning outdoor exercise when pollen levels peak, and using saline nasal rinses after returning home to clear allergens.

If symptoms persist despite these measures, non-sedating antihistamines or topical nasal steroid sprays may help. However, patients are advised to consult a doctor before starting regular medication.

"Pollen allergy is common but often under-recognised," said Dr Eman. "Many patients assume their symptoms are only due to dust exposure or recurrent colds. In my clinic, seasonal respiratory complaints during spring and early autumn often have a clear allergic component, confirmed by history or response to antihistamines. Pollen allergy is definitely not rare, but it is less frequent than perennial dust or pet dander allergy in Bahrain's indoor-heavy lifestyle."

Another family medicine consultant, Dr Jalal Abdullah Kalam, noted that during peak allergy periods, some individuals may experience heightened sensitivity overall.

"In clinical practice, patients prone to allergies may report stronger reactions to triggers such as certain foods, including shellfish or nuts, as the immune system appears more reactive during these periods. While evidence remains limited, this is a commonly observed pattern in practice," he said.

He added that those who spend extended time outdoors, such as delivery personnel and other outdoor workers, are more frequently affected due to higher exposure to dust and airborne particles.

Dr Eman further highlighted that high-risk groups include patients with allergic rhinitis, individuals with asthma, children — especially preschool and school-aged — patients with eczema, and older adults with COPD or heart disease.

Tying expat licences to residency sparks debate

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Driving licences of non-Bahrainis could soon be linked to the validity of their residency permits, if lawmakers approve a new bill under consideration.

One of two proposals up for a vote would also allow executive regulations to set separate rules for foreign applicants.

Urging MPs to back the measures, the Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee said the changes could help ease traffic congestion by giving authorities greater control over the issuance of licences to non-Bahrainis.

Government flags practical concerns

The government, however, warned of implementation challenges. It noted that existing rules already require lawful residency as a basic condition for issuing or renewing a driving licence for non-Bahrainis.

According to officials, linking licences directly to residency permits could create complications related to fees, renewal timelines, and cases where residency periods are shorter or longer than the standard five-year licence term.

Ministers also argued that the proposal may not achieve its intended goal in all cases. For instance, Bahrain's golden residency permit is valid for 10 years—double the duration of a standard

driving licence. They stressed that residency permits and driving licences serve different purposes and should not be formally tied. Concerns were also raised about potential implications for Bahrain's reciprocal arrangements with other countries.

Rights and administrative concerns raised

The Interior Ministry echoed these concerns in written submissions and meetings in November 2024 and January 2025, warning the proposal could create uneven renewal cycles—from one to five years—and strain the General Directorate of Traffic.

It also cited a Constitutional Court ruling, noting that restricting a foreigner's ability to drive could touch on fundamental rights.

The second bill drew stronger criticism. It would allow executive regulations to set separate rules for foreign applicants, which the government said is unnecessary as current provisions already permit this.

The Justice and Interior ministries agreed, adding the measure would not ease congestion and could conflict with freedom of movement.

The National Institution for Human Rights also raised concerns, saying core rules on issuing licences should remain in law, with regulations limited to implementation. Broad delegation, it warned, could raise questions over compliance with Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Committee stance unchanged

Despite these objections, the committee retained the core provisions of both bills. It did, however, propose a minor amendment to the preamble, replacing the reference to the 2018 amendment with the phrase "and its amendments" in citing the Traffic Law.

Hassan BuKhammas, Chairman of Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee

Housing demand surges in Bahrain as applications near 47,000

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Housing demand in Bahrain is surging, with applications nearing 47,000 and carrying an estimated value of BD10.8 billion, according to figures from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

MP Jalal Kazem Mahfoodh

The pressure continues to build. In 2025 alone, around 17,190 new applications were filed, highlighting the steady rise in demand. The data was released in response to a parliamentary query by MP Jalal Mahfoodh.

To keep pace, the government has ramped up spending, allocating up to BD900 million annually between 2023 and 2025 to accelerate housing projects and cut waiting times.

Officials say 23 housing projects have been rolled out in recent years, delivering thousands of homes to citizens. At the same time, support schemes remain in place, offering housing loans, subsidised financing, and public-private partnership initiatives such as "Tas'heel" and "Mazaya". Efforts are also underway to expand affordable housing through private sector collaboration, with major developments progressing in areas like East Sitra and Salman City as part of broader plans to build integrated urban communities.

Auto-renewal plan to ease housing finance delays

A new regulatory step is set to ease pressure on housing applicants, with expired housing finance eligibility certificates to be automatically extended by three months.

The measure covers all certificates that expired in March and April this year, with beneficiaries not required to take any action or visit service centres.

The ministry said the move is aimed at ensuring uninterrupted processing of applications, allowing citizens continued access to housing finance services even after their certificates have lapsed.