

Drops Replace Shots

Painless Treatment to Stop Allergy Symptoms for Europeans



May 1 — Many allergy sufferers in parts of Europe are finding a simpler alternative to injections to ease their suffering — high doses of drops placed under the tongue.

But while allergy sufferers in France, Italy and Germany have easy access to the "allergen extract," Americans for now will have to do their homework to get the same type of relief. As many as 40 million Americans suffer sneezing and wheezing, runny noses and itchy eyes from inhaling pollen from trees, and grass, and weeds.

The drops are an alternative to injections and can be taken at home rather than at a doctor's office.

"It is an effective treatment for severe nasal and eye allergies," says Dr. Jean Bousquet, director of the allergy clinic at the Pasteur Institute in France. "For example, if you are allergic to grass pollen you are giving the patient increasing doses of grass pollen."

So Far, So Good

The drops have been so effective for allergy sufferer Mor Ndiaye that he can now enjoy the outdoors again.

"Before the treatment I could not have been outside talking to you. As soon as I was getting out, I was sneezing," he says.

According to more than a dozen published European studies, in patients who received high doses of pollen and dust mites, allergy symptoms were reduced by about 30 percent, and the need for medications to control symptoms was reduced by more than 50 percent.

The treatment is considered so effective that the health-care system in France pays for it. And so do several others in Europe.

What About the United States?

Last year, the World Health Organization called it a viable alternative to injections. So why is it not being encouraged for use in the United States?

"There's a lot of potential for this approach because it's simple and it's safe. But I think more studies have to be done in our country before we can recommend it," says Dr. Richard Lockey of the University of Florida.

Specifically, American doctors want to study whether the drops are as effective as allergy shots, and whether they're effective on combinations of allergens. The federal Food and Drug Administration has not begun a review of the drops because it wants to see results from the studies.

But some U.S. doctors are offering the drops to their patients. The trick for Americans is to find an allergist who offers the drops and who knows the right dose to provide.

In Europe, meanwhile, the treatment is already helping more than a million people this year enjoy springtime, without the suffering.