



PRESS RELEASE

More Europeans will be allergic to pollen if no measure is taken to reduce exposure

Brussels, 24 June 2015, ahead of INTERNATIONAL RAGWEED DAY – Climate change is a result of industrialised human activity severely impacting our health and environment. While many actions have been taken to inform about and tackle climate change effects on the environment, the impact that air pollution, manufacturing and farming have on our health remain unaddressed.

Allergy is the most common chronic disease in Europe, with 20% prevalence in the population (1). The disease has been neglected to date because patients have been coping with their symptoms, even if severe, without much support. But the burden allergy is posing to our lives is getting worse (2). If no action is taken to stop the allergy epidemic, 1 in 2 Europeans will suffer from allergy by 2025 with no age, social or geographical distinction (3). Allergic symptoms are set to worsen due to climate change, as air pollution increases the aggressiveness of pollen particles and extends the reproductive season of plants.

Ragweed is one of the main plants making our body react negatively. It is an invasive plant of North American origin that is costing Europe alone 3.5 billion Euro per year on medication to ease the allergic symptoms it provokes (4). Ragweed is spreading quickly and its highly allergenic pollen can be transported by wind over far distances. Air concentrations of allergenic ragweed pollen could quadruple in Europe by 2050 (5).

International Ragweed Society (IRS) President Dr. Maira Bonini said: “Health problems due to ragweed are underestimated. On the International Ragweed Day next 27 June, we call for a European legislation to tackle the problems due to ragweed, including management practices against this plant and pollen monitoring to measure their success reducing the health risks”.

Today, EU legislation excludes pollen monitoring because pollen is not considered a result of human activities. Although pollen emissions and aggressiveness are mostly a consequence of massive farming, air pollution, and city planning, the European Union does not require Member States to collect this information and communicate it to the public (6). European measures to control human-made pollen emissions seem unrealistic.

European Aerobiology Society (EAS) President Dr. Michel Thibaudon said: “Highly allergenic trees are planted close to people’s houses and schools, because pollen emissions and their interaction with human activities are not taken into account when planning. We need to systematically collect this data to take informed decisions to protect our health from pollen emissions”.

European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Associations (EFA) President Christine Rolland said: “Allergy is not a trivial disease. It imposes a burden on healthcare systems and patients. Setting up a real-time pollen information system in Europe would enable patients to take daily actions to avoid their symptoms getting worse, diminishing their impact on productivity”.

European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) President Antonella Muraro said: “We need targeted and comprehensive solutions to overcome the burden related to allergic rhinitis and asthma associated with sensitisation to ragweed. Allergen immunotherapy (AIT) is effective in adults and children for pollen allergy and it may alter the natural course of allergic diseases since it reduces the development of asthma and of new sensitisations and is effective several years after its cessation. The EAACI’s new Presidential project 2015-2017 will develop comprehensive guidelines for clinical practice on Allergen Immunotherapy,



International Ragweed Society

embracing all the different stakeholders (e.g. Clinicians, Immunologists, Primary care, Regulatory Bodies, Allied Health Representatives, Patient Organisations)".

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

The International Ragweed Day (IRD) is celebrated the first Saturday of the summer to increase understanding and awareness of the problem this invasive weed causes all over the world. The day was chosen because it is early in the growing season of the plant thereby gives enough time for preparations and actions.

- 1) EAACI Advocacy Manifesto 2014: <http://www.eaaci.org/images/resources/fellowships/awardees/EAACI-Advocacy-manifesto-Nov2014.pdf>
- 2) EFA Book on Respiratory Allergies 2011: <http://www.efanet.org/images/documents/EFABookonRespiratoryAllergiesFINAL.pdf>
- 3) Cf. EAACI Advocacy Manifesto
- 4) Assessing and controlling the spread and the effects of common ragweed in Europe, 2010: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/docs/Final_Final_Report.pdf
- 5) EU Funded Project Atopica: <https://www.atopica.eu/NewsData.aspx?IdNews=180&ViewType=Actual&IdType=316>
- 6) Joint EFA-EAACI-EAS Petition to set up a biological air monitoring within the European Union, December 2013: http://www.efanet.org/images/2013/12/Joint_Biological_Air_Monitoring_Petition-14dec2013.pdf

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The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) is a non-profit organisation active in the field of allergic and immunologic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis, eczema, occupational allergy, food and drug allergy and anaphylaxis. EAACI was founded in 1956 in Florence and has become the largest medical association in Europe in the field of allergy and clinical immunology. It includes over 9,000 members from 121 countries, as well as 49 National Allergy Societies.

www.eaaci.org

The European Aerobiology Society (EAS) is a non-profit association working on the different topics from monitoring, regulation, standardisation, and health impact due to biological airborne particles. EAS was the convenor of a CEN Technical Sheet for the sampling and analysis of airborne biological particles. <http://eas.polleninfo.org/>

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is a non-profit network representing 40 allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) patients' organisations in 24 countries, and over 400,000 patients. www.efanet.org

The International Ragweed Society (IRS) is a non-profit association aiming to promote the knowledge concerning ragweed; to facilitate collaboration, research, education, information, technical development and laws concerning ragweed and its direct and indirect impacts, as well as fight against the plant; to create a platform for the people, associations, societies and institutions with an interest in ragweed; to encourage collaboration with other areas related to environmental and health issues. www.internationalragweedsociety.org