

Press Release

DEKRA experts advise realistic self-assessment

Hay fever can be dangerous behind the wheel

- ▶ Allergy symptoms impair reaction times
- ▶ Medication can also have a negative effect
- ▶ Take allergy symptoms seriously and act with caution

Millions of people suffer from hay fever during the pollen season. In addition to health problems, allergies can also affect driving ability. Experts at DEKRA point out that both the symptoms themselves and medications to relieve them can impair performance when driving.

Typical symptoms such as watery or itchy eyes, a runny or stuffy nose, and sudden sneezing fits directly impair perception in traffic. A sneezing fit causes you to close your eyes briefly. At a speed of 50 km/h (31 mph), this means a risky blind flight of 14 meters (46 feet) in just one second.

Allergic reactions to pollen and other allergens are often accompanied by symptoms such as fatigue, exhaustion, or difficulty concentrating. The consequences are similar to the well-known risks of fatigue at the wheel: prolonged reaction times, decreased attention, and an increased susceptibility to errors.

Medications for allergy symptoms are another risk factor. Older-generation antihistamines in particular can cause drowsiness and significantly reduce reaction times. But even modern pharmaceuticals affect each person differently. Particularly when starting to take medication or changing medication, the possible effects on driving ability should therefore be taken into account – preferably, the medication should be taken in the evening before going to bed.

“Drivers often underestimate the fact that even slight health impairments can affect their driving ability,” says DEKRA traffic physician Dr. Almut Schönermarck. “Anyone who is driving with severe allergy symptoms or taking medication with a sedative effect may be as impaired as an overtired driver. Before setting off, you should always ask yourself critically whether you are fit to drive.”

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It can be particularly dangerous when several factors come together. High pollen counts, long journeys, fatigue, and medication can reinforce each other's effects. During the spring months, commuters are particularly affected, as symptoms are often most pronounced in the morning and evening.

DEKRA therefore recommends that allergy sufferers take a few simple measures to improve road safety:

- Refrain from driving or cycling if you are tired or have concentration problems
- Replace interior filters and pollen filters regularly
- Keep windows closed when pollen counts are high and use ventilation
- Test the effects of medication by taking it in the evening before actively participating in road traffic
- Follow the instructions on driving ability in the package insert
- Wear sunglasses to reduce eye irritation
- If you have severe sneezing attacks, refrain from actively participating in road traffic or interrupt your journey.

Simple preventive measures can also help reduce symptoms. It can be helpful to shake out your clothes frequently, wash your hair before going to bed, and check the current pollen count before long drives to assess your individual risk of allergic symptoms.

“Road safety depends not only on the technical condition of the vehicle, but also on the condition of the person behind the wheel,” says the DEKRA expert. “Anyone who feels ill, tired, or impaired should refrain from driving.”

Hay fever affects more and more people, and climate change is exacerbating the problem. This is because plants are flowering earlier and for longer. They are also producing more pollen, which is often more aggressive.

“Precisely because pollen allergies are so widespread, too many people do not take the safety risk seriously,” says the doctor. “Conscious preparation for the pollen season and responsible management of symptoms and medication make an important contribution to greater safety on our roads.”

Picture caption

Allergies can affect driving ability. Typical symptoms directly impair perception in traffic.

Photo: Werner Popp / DEKRA

A decorative green arrow graphic on the left side of the page, pointing to the right, with a gradient from dark green to light green.

About DEKRA

For more than 100 years, DEKRA has been a trusted name in safety. Founded in 1925 with the original goal of improving road safety through vehicle inspections, DEKRA has grown to become the world's largest independent, non-listed expert organization in the field of testing, inspection, and certification. Today, as a global partner, the company supports its customers with comprehensive services and solutions to drive safety and sustainability forward—fully aligned with DEKRA's anniversary motto, "Securing the Future." In 2024, DEKRA generated revenue of 4.3 billion euros. Around 48,000 employees are providing qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries across five continents. DEKRA holds a Platinum rating from EcoVadis, placing it among the top 1% of the world's most sustainable companies.