



Ask Isa

Isa and Deb Helfrich

If you have a question for me, please e-mail it to: admin@therapydogs.org. I can use your name or you can remain anonymous! Looking forward to your questions! —Isa

Dear Isa:

I am a poodle and I've heard I am okay to visit people normally allergic to dogs...is this true? What should we know about people with allergies?

—Poofy

Dear Poofy:

Excellent question! Read on—maybe this will help. Also, good luck with your visits!

AH...CHOOOOO! DOG ALLERGIES AND THERAPY DOG VISITS

You may encounter people who would LOVE to pat your dog, but simply can't due to allergy. Dogs can also trigger an asthma attack in people who have asthma that is aggravated by extrinsic factors.

Dog allergies are common, but each person's reactions may vary widely. Don't be fooled into thinking a typical allergy attack is simply a benign case of the sniffles and some watery eyes which quickly are alleviated once the pet has left the room. Sure, for many people, an allergy attack is merely an annoying inconvenience. However, for some, allergy attacks can be much more severe, causing unconsciousness, closing of the throat or swelling of the tongue, and hives. Also, pet dander can remain in an uncleaned or unventilated room long after the pet leaves, so once you go, the allergy attack doesn't go with you!

Also, the notion that some breeds are "hypo-allergenic" is a myth. While some people may react to some breeds more than others, many allergic people have been subject

to horrific attacks because someone plopped a dog on their bed and said "It's okay, he's hypoallergenic!" Please respect allergies even if you've been told your dog is a hypoallergenic breed.

What can you do to respect the health of allergy patients?

- Once someone alerts you to allergy, leave that person's space right away!
- If you must visit a patient who shares a room with someone with allergy, ask the person first if it is safe for you to visit; if so, make your visit as brief as possible.
- Since allergies aren't necessarily posted on a room door as an "isolation" warning is, it can be a good idea to ask the head nurse to make you aware of any allergy patients on the floor so you can avoid those rooms.

Thanks to Dr. Michael Ricci for his advice and review on this article!



The "Ask Isa" column appears in the Therapy Dogs of Vermont newsletter—reproduced here for TDV website readers. It is not meant as a substitute for seeking proper veterinary, training, or behavioral advice from professionals!