

## PATTERNS; Allergen Tracks Point to the Dog

The truth about cats and dogs is that dogs seem to be worse, at least for people with asthma.

That finding, presented last week at the American Thoracic Society International Conference in Seattle, may surprise many asthma patients. The study, led by Dr. Timothy Craig of the Pennsylvania State University Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, looked at sources of allergens to see which posed the biggest risk. Apart from cats and dogs, the researchers looked at nine other allergens, including mites, molds, cockroaches and other sources like trees and grass. While it was true that cats caused the most reactions in the 809 patients studied -- about 72 percent reacted -- dogs, which affected 38 percent of the patients, caused the most severe reactions. The researchers used skin tests for each allergen, and then assessed the reaction by measuring changes in the amount of air exhaled and in the amount of nitric oxide in the air (a sign of irritation), plus changes in phlegm. All the allergen sources tested caused reactions, but only dogs affected all three measurements, the researchers said. The conclusions, the researchers said, suggest that doctors who treat asthma should press their patients to consider not having pets that give off allergens. But patients should make sure there is really a problem before giving up a pet. "Definitely I would suggest someone be skin-tested before they remove a dog from the home," Dr. Craig said.