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European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) Annual Congress

Up to 17% of the European population could suffer some kind of food allergy

This is data on self-reported food allergy included in the first European guidelines on food reactions and anaphylaxis, edited by the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI)

The most common food allergies in Europe are related to cow's milk, eggs, soy, wheat, nuts, fish and seafood

The frequency of food allergy is greater among children than among adults, and higher in north-western Europe

Copenhagen (Denmark), 10 June 2014 – Food allergy and anaphylaxis continue to be pending topics for both patients and healthcare professionals, although 6-17% of the European population has some kind of food allergy, according to self-reported evidence.

The lack of understanding surrounding food allergy, its impact on quality of life, the costs that it generates and reduced awareness of the potential fatality of a serious allergic reaction like anaphylaxis are the reasons that have led the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) to promote and edit unprecedented guidelines in Europe about Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis.

The new guidelines, presented on occasion of the EAACI Annual Congress being held in Copenhagen, were drafted by more than 70 experts from the world over, with the direct involvement of all EAACI sections (Paediatrics, Immunology, Dermatology, Asthma, Primary Care, etc.). Also involved were 21 international patient organisations, plus European scientific societies related to Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN), Emergency Medicine (EuSEM) and the Association for Teacher Training Europe (ATEE).

Greater frequency among children

The principal objective of the EAACI guidelines is to provide a complete scientific update covering five topics: food allergy, prevention, quality of life, anaphylaxis and allergy management in the patient's setting.

Based on a broad systematic review, the guidelines conclude that the frequency of food allergy is greater among children than in adults and higher in north-west

Europe than in the south. It also maintains that, although its incidence appears to be stable over time, its prevalence could be growing.

With regards to risk factors, sex, age and country of residence, the presence of other allergic conditions and a family history of allergy could be important factors.

Most common food allergies

The most common food allergies in Europe are related to cow's milk, eggs, soy, wheat, peanuts, nuts, fish and seafood. However, there were previously no reliable estimates of the prevalence of these allergies. After a systematic review of close to sixty studies and meta-analyses, the experts who participated in the guidelines conclude that the prevalence of cow's milk allergy in Europe is 6%, 3.6% for wheat, 2.5% for eggs, 0.4% for peanuts, 1.3% for nuts, 2.2% for fish and 1.3% for seafood, according to self-reported food allergy.

Allergy to cow's milk and egg is more common among young people and children, while reactions to nuts, fish and seafood are more common among adults and the elderly.

According to their parents, at least 1 out of every 20 children has had one or more food allergies. Milk products are most commonly identified by parents, although the guidelines maintain that the greatest prevalence is found in wheat, nuts, egg and seafood.

Anaphylaxis: potentially fatal

The other major process highlighted in EAACI guidelines is anaphylaxis, a severe generalised or systemic hypersensitivity reaction, potentially fatal, characterised by rapid onset and association with respiratory or circulatory problems and changes in the skin and mucous membranes.

According to the review included in the guidelines, its incidence is from 1.5 to 8 cases per 100,000 people per year. Its main triggers include food, drugs and insect bites, although the inducer is not identified in 20% of all cases.

Although the prevalence of anaphylaxis is estimated at 0.3%, the EAACI guidelines highlight the need for it to be the focus of all healthcare professionals, not only allergologists.

About EAACI

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 7,800 members from 121 countries, as well as 47 National Allergy Societies.



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REFERENCES

All data taken from *EAACI Guidelines. Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis*. European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) 2014