

One in five kids with food allergies treated in emergency department in past year

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Researchers from Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and colleagues estimate that nearly 8 percent of U.S. children (about 5.6 million) have food allergies, with nearly 40 percent allergic to more than one food. These findings were based on their latest national food allergy prevalence survey, which assessed over 38,000 children. The study, published in *Pediatrics*, also reveals striking new statistics that reflect food allergy severity—one in five of children needed treatment in the emergency department (ED) in the past year for a life-threatening reaction to food, while 42 percent reported at least one lifetime food allergy related ED visit. However, only 40 percent of children with food allergies had a current prescription for an epinephrine auto-injector, which is necessary for immediate treatment of a severe allergic reaction.

"We now understand that 20 percent of children with a food [allergy](#) in the U.S. are having an allergic reaction requiring a trip to the ED in the past year," says lead author Ruchi Gupta, MD, MPH, from Lurie Children's, who also is a Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Knowing this, it is essential that these children are prepared with an action plan and an epinephrine auto-injector. Only 40 percent of these children had a current prescription for one."

The most common food allergies in the U.S. included peanut—affecting about 1.6 million children—followed by allergy to milk (1.4 million), shellfish (1 million), tree nut (900,000), egg (600,000), fin fish (400,000), wheat (400,000) and soy (400,000). Sesame was the ninth

most common food allergen, affecting about 150,000 children.

"Our study found that sesame allergy prevalence and severity is comparable to that of other food allergens for which labeling is currently mandated, suggesting that sesame should be included under allergen labeling laws in the U.S., as is already the case in Canada, the European Union, Australia and Israel," says Dr. Gupta.

As in the previous prevalence study published by Dr. Gupta and colleagues in 2011, the current study reports that Black children were more likely to have food allergies than White children. Black children also were more likely to have multiple food allergies than children of other racial or ethnic groups.

"More research is needed to understand the reason behind these racial differences in food allergy," says Dr. Gupta.

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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