More Kids Reported to Have Allergies, but Why?

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Are children growing up in households that are so clean they are leaving the kids more sensitive to allergy triggers? Or are parents today just paying closer attention to allergic reactions? Whatever the explanation is, rashes and reactions sparked by allergies are on the rise in children and experts say they aren't exactly sure what's behind the increase, according to a big U.S. government survey reported by The Associated Press.

The survey from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that about one in 20 American children have food allergies, up 50 percent from allergy rates in the late 1990s. What's more, kids also experienced an increase of 69 percent in skin allergies, with one in eight kids affected.

In the study, thousands of parents were asked if—in the previous year—their child had any kind of food or digestive allergy, skin allergy such as eczema, or respiratory allergy like hay fever. Interestingly, there were no reported increases in the latter category.

One of the more popular theories going around is "the hygiene hypothesis." This theory says that exposing children to germs and parasites early on somehow prevents the body from developing certain allergies. In addition, the hypothesis argues that there is a serious downside to America's recent obsession with disinfection and antibiotics. Others blame genetically modified foods for the spike, although studies haven't supported this theory. And some also suspect that an unknown air pollutant may be the culprit.

But other experts counter that many food and skin allergies today are mild. They say kids often grow out of allergies. Also, the CDC conducted its surveys via personal interviews without checking medical records first. "We see a lot of kids in clinic that really aren't allergic to the foods their parents worry about," said Morton Galina, MD, a pediatric allergist at the Emory School of Medicine.

The CDC report also found that food and respiratory allergies were more common in higher income families but skin allergies were more common among the poor. In addition, the survey showed that African Americans are more likely to have skin problems, with 17 percent affected compared with 12 percent of Caucasian children.

Studies also showed that people with African ancestry are more likely to have food allergies. Click here to read more.

To read the AP report, click here.

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