



For immediate release

National study finds fewer food allergies among new immigrants and Canadians with low education

HAMILTON, ON (9 September 2014) – Researchers from the Allergy, Genes and Environment (AllerGen) Network have published the first nationwide study to estimate the prevalence of food allergy among vulnerable Canadians, including those with low income, those with low education, new Canadians and individuals of Aboriginal identity.

The study, *Surveying Prevalence of Food Allergy in All Canadian Environments (SPACE)*, was published in September in the [Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice](#). It concluded that Canadians with lower education and new Canadians (individuals who immigrated to Canada within the last 10 years) have fewer food allergies than the general population. The study also found that there were no differences in the prevalence of food allergy according to income or Aboriginal status.

The research was conducted by a team of AllerGen investigators and led by Ann Clarke, a professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Calgary, and Susan Elliott, a professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the University of Waterloo.

In a [previous AllerGen-funded study](#), the authors found that 8% of Canadians self-report a food allergy and prevalence differs across socioeconomic groups and geographic regions.

The current study is based on data collected from 5,734 households, representing over 15,000 individuals from low income, immigrant and Aboriginal populations across Canada. The study measured food allergy prevalence as self-reported by respondents.

“This research enables us not only to better characterize the prevalence and experience of food allergy in Canada, but also to understand how the environment may influence its development,” says Lianne Soller, first author of the study.

The reasons for the lower prevalence of food allergy among vulnerable Canadians are not clear; this difference could be due to a range of factors that require further research, according to the authors.

Although immigrants were less likely to experience food allergy, the odds of their self-reporting food allergy increased by 2% with each additional year of residence in Canada.

“These findings support the ‘healthy immigrant effect,’ which states that new Canadians tend to have a low prevalence of chronic conditions, but their health status worsens with time and eventually converges with that of the Canadian-born population,” says Clarke.

The study’s findings will help researchers to better understand the lived experiences of food allergies in vulnerable populations. The findings may also help to identify and address gaps in

education, health care and public policy, and to ensure equal opportunity for all Canadians to seek and receive appropriate care related to food allergies.

About AllerGen NCE

[AllerGen NCE Inc.](#), the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network (est. 2004), is a national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life of people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. Funded by Industry Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program, the Network is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton. Visit www.allergen-nce.ca for more information.

About the University of Calgary

The University of Calgary is a leading Canadian university located in the nation's most enterprising city. The university has a clear strategic direction – “Eyes High” – to become one of Canada's top five research universities by 2016, grounded in innovative learning and teaching and fully integrated with the community of Calgary. For more information, visit ucalgary.ca.

About the University of Waterloo

In just half a century, the University of Waterloo, located at the heart of Canada's technology hub, has become one of Canada's leading comprehensive universities with 35,000 full- and part-time students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Waterloo, as home to the world's largest post-secondary co-operative education program, embraces its connections to the world and encourages enterprising partnerships in learning, research and discovery. In the next decade, the university is committed to building a better future for Canada and the world by championing innovation and collaboration to create solutions relevant to the needs of today and tomorrow. For more information about Waterloo, visit www.uwaterloo.ca.

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