

PRESS RELEASE

EAACI: 17 million Europeans allergic to food; allergies in children doubled in the last 10 years

Zurich/Venice, 17 February 2011 – About 17 million people in Europe suffer from food allergies, with 3.5 million younger than 25 years. Allergies in children between 0 and 5 have doubled over the last ten years and access to the emergency room for severe anaphylactic reactions has increased seven-fold.

There are millions of people in Europe for whom even going to the restaurant can be fatal, if the sauce has a bit of cheese or the dessert has traces of hazelnuts. This burden is particularly heavy for children, whose normally active and sociable lifestyle can be severely limited and frustrated for the effort to keep them away from potentially dangerous food. Prevalence of allergies in children changes within Europe, with rates ranging from 1,7 percent in Greece to 4 percent in Italy and Spain, to over 5 percent in France, UK, Netherlands and Germany.

The latest figures and scientific findings are going to be discussed by over 600 top health experts, including allergists and paediatricians, in Venice, Italy during the 2011 Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Meeting by the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) that opens today.

"Allergic reactions appear to be increasing, probably due to changes in nutrition patterns, exposure to environmental factors such as cigarette smoke and changes in lifestyle," says Prof. Maria Antonella Muraro, Chair of the EAACI Meeting. "The lack of exposure to potential allergens since childhood appears to reduce the chances that our immune system recognizes what is safe and what is not, even triggering a response against proteins found in foods and generally tolerated by the body."

In continental Europe the most common food allergy on average is to fresh fruit and vegetables, while in Anglo-Saxon countries walnuts, hazelnuts and peanuts are more dangerous. Allergy to shellfish and fish, especially cod, prevails in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. Over 60 percent of allergic patients are women, probably because of biological and psychological factors, research showed. Across Europe, children appear to be more allergic to milk, eggs and nuts, which remain the most frequent cause of anaphylactic shock in children, as stated by Prof. Graham Roberts from Southampton.

"This is the first ever EAACI meeting entirely dedicated to food allergies and anaphylaxis and has been intended to offer a platform to the world's top professional experts to address treatment of food allergies and the best ways to reduce the risk they can become fatal," says EAACI's President Prof. Jan Lötvall.

The prevalence of food allergies among adults in Europe is fairly homogeneous, with few exceptions: in Denmark, only 1,6 percent of the population has problems with food, while in other countries the proportion of allergic patients fluctuates around 3 percent, with peaks reported in Italy, France and Germany, where they are 3.5 percent of the total



population. European figures also show that the prevalence of food allergies is particularly high in women, who account for 60 percent of allergy patients.

"The reasons for this higher percentage remain unclear, but hypotheses include many biological and psychological factors," explains Prof. Muraro. "Estrogen, for example, can increase women's biological vulnerability to diseases involving the immune system. Also, the perception of the disease is increased in women, thus affecting how they deal with the problem."

Risk factors for severe food allergic reactions, exposure to potentially dangerous new allergens and the use of life-saving devices, such epinephrine auto-injectors, will also be addressed during the EAACI Meeting, which includes a workshop with patients' organizations and meetings with representatives of the food industry and regulatory bodies.

About EAACI :

EAACI - The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology 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 6'100 members from 107 countries, as well as 41 National Allergy Societies.

Throughout 2011, EAACI will develop different activities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of immunotherapy in Allergy, which will aim at increasing the knowledge in this field among healthcare professionals, increase awareness in the general population, and finally, promote the availability of immunotherapy for allergic patients.

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