

Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/programs/frontlines-food-allergies/uncovering-the-burden-of-childhood-food-allergies-key-findings-from-a-survey/26315/>

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Uncovering the Burden of Childhood Food Allergies: Key Findings from a Survey

Announcer Intro

You're listening to *On the Frontlines of Food Allergies* on ReachMD. On this episode, Dr. Ruchi Gupta will share key findings from her survey, which focused on uncovering the burden of childhood food allergies. In addition to being a Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Dr. Gupta is also the Founding Director of Northwestern's Center for Food Allergy and Asthma Research. Let's hear from her now.

Dr. Gupta:

We conducted a study looking at the prevalence of childhood food allergy really to better understand what's happening out there and what is the public health impact. And what we did is we surveyed 40,000 households and the children to see who has a food allergy. We had to ask if they thought they had a food allergy, but then we had to get into symptoms, and as experts, we had to look at the symptoms and say, "Oh, okay, this really looks like a true food allergy versus an intolerance." So when we did our survey, what we came up with is that about 12 percent of kids seem to report a food allergy, but only about 8 percent of kids have a food allergy. That's about 1 in 13 kids. And only about 5 percent of those have gone to a doctor for diagnosis.

We also looked at severity, and what we learned is that over 50 percent of people reported having a severe allergic reaction to most of the foods. And about 1 in 5 kids were going to the hospital in a given year for a food-allergic reaction. So 1 in 5, that's 20 percent, so that's a lot. And almost half of them had been to the emergency room at some point in their life with a food-allergic reaction.

Now the other thing we learned that was really interesting is what are the most common food allergens. So we came up with a list of the top 9, and that includes: peanuts, which everyone knows, the tree nuts—those are pistachios, walnuts, almonds, etc.—shellfish, finfish, milk, egg, soy, wheat, and now the ninth one we found was sesame, and that is an allergy that's very common in Europe, and we're seeing it happen more and more in the US.

Another key finding from the study was looking at age distribution. So we talked about the top nine allergens, but when do we see them occurring? So for young children less than 1, we really see milk and egg coming on first, and then peanuts, but in that first 5 years of life, you do see milk and egg.

Now what is interesting is food allergies are not necessarily lifelong. Many people grow out of their food allergies. So in our study, what we found was that about half the kids were growing out of milk and egg allergy. Similar is wheat and soy. Those are common early, and they may be common early because those are foods that kids are eating early in life, so they tend to develop early, but many kids do grow out of them.

Now peanut and tree nuts we saw starting early, and we saw less kids growing out of them. Those tend to stick around. So for peanuts and tree nuts, only about 15 to 20 percent naturally outgrow their food allergy, but it does happen, and what we found is certain tree nuts happen faster. So walnut and pistachio are kind of tough, but almonds and hazelnut people do tend to grow out of.

It's exciting to see some of them go away. And then for the ones that don't, we're getting better treatments for.

Announcer Close

That was Dr. Ruchi Gupta talking about her research on childhood food allergies. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit *On the Frontlines of Food Allergies* on ReachMD dot com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!