

Canberra parents lack allergy awareness: Study

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Nearly four per cent of ACT kindergarten children have a peanut allergy and while the region's schools are well prepared to cope with this, some parents are taking inappropriate action when dealing with their child's allergy, according to a new study.

The research was a co-operative study by the Academic Unit of General Practice and Community Health at The Australian National University's Medical School and ACT Health. It surveyed 3851 children in the region to discover the prevalence of peanut and nut allergies, what management systems were in place in schools and how [parents](#) viewed and reacted to their child's [allergy](#).

Professor Marjan Kljakovic of the ANU Medical School said the study - probably the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere - indicated that worries about the rate of peanut and nut allergy were well-founded.

"Our study shows that 3.8 per cent of five year olds in the ACT have a history of [peanut allergy](#) - that's a high number of children," he said.

"However, while there's a lot of hype about peanut allergy, it's still relatively uncommon."

The study showed that 94 per cent of local schools were aware of their students' allergies and 76 per cent had a management procedure in place for the school to act when the [child](#) had an allergic reaction. However, Professor Kljakovic said that some of the responses indicated that the public health messages that were getting through to schools were not

making it through to the region's parents.

"The study showed two things of concern. The first is that action on food allergy was influenced by the level of worry the parent had about their child's allergy. In other words, the less worried parents were about food allergies, the less likely they were to observe their child having symptoms and to act on them.

"The second concern is that some parents reacted inappropriately following seeing their child having an allergic reaction to peanut. In such cases, it is not appropriate to 'watch and wait for the reaction to subside', 'induce vomiting in the child' or 'apply calamine lotion to the skin', as some parents seemed to think.

"Parents should administer oral antihistamines as soon as they notice their child having an allergic response to peanuts, and the symptoms could include hives on the skin, swelling around the mouth, lips or eyes, abdominal pain or vomiting. If the child has a history of severe anaphylactic reaction to peanut, with further symptoms including collapse or wheezy breathing, then an adrenalin auto-injector should be administered. All children should be sent to their GP following an allergic reaction, who will most likely refer the child for specialist tests," said Professor Kljakovic.

More information: The study, The parent-reported prevalence and management of peanut and nut allergy in school children in the Australian Capital Territory, has been published in *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*.

Source: Research Australia ([news](#) : [web](#))

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