

Allergies among youth on the rise

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Asthma, nasal symptoms and eczema is a major public health problem in Sweden, not least among young people. Half of all teenagers are affected in Västra Götaland County in West Sweden. This is shown in a study conducted in 2008 by the Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg, on the request of the Public Health Committee, Region Västra Götaland. The study also shows that the prevalence of allergies among young people has increased by ten percentage points since the year 2000.

The study includes all residents of Västra Götaland County (pop. 1.5 million) born in 1992, and is a follow-up to a similar study conducted in 2000. The results show that 49 percent of the teenagers suffer from physician-diagnosed [asthma](#), nasal symptoms or atopic eczema. The most common problem is nasal symptoms, followed by asthma and atopic [eczema](#), and allergies are more common among girls than boys.

The proportion of teenagers with allergies is almost ten percentage points larger in this study than in 2000. This increase reflects mainly an increase in nasal symptoms and secondly an increase in asthma.

'Compared to in 2000, a considerably larger number of teenagers have experienced a runny nose, sneezing attacks and other nasal symptoms without having a cold. But we don't know the reason for this increase. We need to do more research to figure that out', says Jonas Brisman, chief physician and project leader of the study at the Section of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg.

More fish and butter - less asthma?

The study also points to a link between fish and butter and less asthma. 'Those who eat more fish and butter tend to have a lower rate of asthma, and this relationship has been noted in other studies as well. We plan to analyse the connection between diet and allergies further in a forthcoming report', says Brisman.

Medical educational and vocational counselling in schools

Brisman feels that the growing number of youth with allergies requires a continued effort to manage the [allergy](#) issue:

'The increased general level of skin and airway sensitivity calls for measures to create healthy indoor environments, primarily in schools but eventually also in the young people's future workplaces. There is also a need for information to children, youth and parents, such as medical educational and vocational counselling in schools.'

Two more reports connected to the study will be presented: one later this autumn on dietary habits and one in 2010 on health from a socio-economic perspective.

'We want to explore whether there is a connection between diet and allergies, and also whether there are differences between different groups in terms of allergies. If there are, our findings can help direct certain measures to where they are needed the most', says Karin Engdahl (Social Democrat), Chairman of the [Public Health](#) Committee, Region Västra Götaland.

Provided by University of Gothenburg ([news](#) : [web](#))

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