

First trimester of pregnancy linked to allergy risk

October 19 2010

A new study published on Wednesday boosts suspicions that a child's risk of allergies could be linked to the season that coincides with the first three months of pregnancy.

Researchers cast an eye over the health records of 5,920 children born between 2001 and 2006 in the southern Finnish province of South Karelia, 961 of whom were given skin tests for allergies by the age of four.

Among these, 10 percent of those who were born in October and November tested positive, twice the proportion of those born in June and July. Allergy sensitivity among the October-November babies was especially strong for milk and eggs.

The possible reason, suggest the investigators, is that the October-November babies were exposed to high concentrations of birch and alder pollen while they were at a key stage of foetal development -- in the 11th week of pregnancy.

The peak pollen period for these trees is in April and May.

Conversely, the lowest pollen period was December and January, which explains why children born in June and July had the lowest [allergy](#) sensitivity.

Exposure in the womb to powerful [allergens](#) at a crucial early phase of

pregnancy could affect the development of the baby's immune system, although how this happens is unclear, the researchers say.

The study, headed by Kaisa Pyrhonen of the Institute of Health Sciences at the University of Oulu, appears in a British publication, the [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](#).

It boosts previous findings in studies carried out in Sweden, Japan and the Netherlands that children born in the northern hemisphere's autumn or winter are more prone to eczema and asthma-like wheeze, and have higher levels of antigens in the blood than children born in spring or summer.

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Citation: First trimester of pregnancy linked to allergy risk (2010, October 19) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-10-trimester-pregnancy-linked-allergy.html>

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