

# Early exposure to pets does not increase children's risk of allergies

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A new study published in the journal *Clinical & Experimental Allergy* reveals that keeping a dog or cat in the home does not increase children's risk of becoming allergic to the pets.

Parents of young children frequently want to know whether keeping a dog or cat in their home will increase the risk of their children becoming allergic to their pets.

Led by Ganesa Wegienka, MS, PhD, of the Department of Public Health Sciences, Henry Ford Hospital, researchers followed a group of children from birth until they reached adulthood. Periodic contact was made with the parents and the children to collect information about exposure to cats and dogs.

At age 18 years, 565 study participants supplied blood samples to the researchers, who measured antibodies to dog and cat allergens in the samples.

Results found that being exposed to the specific animal in the first year of life was the most important exposure period, and the exposure appeared protective in some groups.

Young men whose families had kept an indoor dog during their first year of life had about half the risk of becoming sensitized to dogs compared to those whose families did not keep a dog in the first year of life.

Both men and women were about half as likely to be sensitized to cats if they had lived with a cat in the first year of life, compared to those who did not live with cats.

"This research provides further evidence that experiences in the first year of life are associated with health status later in life, and that early life pet exposure does not put most children at risk of being sensitized to these animals later in life," Wegienka concludes.

Provided by Wiley

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