

A solution to a life-threatening allergy

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Shellfish allergy to prawns, crab and lobster is a growing problem globally and in Australia

For around one in 100 Australians who have food allergy, simply ingesting a small amount of pasta containing shellfish can be life-threatening.

Monash University researchers have taken a step towards identifying major [allergens](#) in Australian [shellfish](#) embarking on new research in collaboration with James Cook University, Queensland.

Led by Professor Robyn O’Hehir and Emeritus Professor Jennifer Rolland from Monash University’s Department of Allergy and Immunology, the project aims to identify important shellfish allergens, working towards effective treatment to prevent shellfish allergy.

“Shellfish allergy to prawns, crab and lobster is a growing problem globally and in Australia, which has the highest prevalence of food allergy in the world. It represents the biggest [food allergy](#) threat to children and adults,” Professor O’Hehir said.

A chronic life-long disease, shellfish allergy has no cure. Careful diagnosis allows for avoidance of seafood, with emergency treatment available for accidental exposure.

Milk and egg allergies are usually resolved by school-age, however more serious peanut and shellfish allergy tends to continue into adulthood.

“Despite an increasing prevalence of allergic diseases to shellfish, the allergens responsible are not well understood,” Professor O’Hehir said.

“Current diagnostics rely on shellfish species present in the northern hemisphere and are often not able to detect allergy to local species found in Australia.”

It is hoped that research will lead to preventative treatment for shellfish allergy, similar to vaccines used to treat bee or wasp allergy.

The most dangerous symptoms include breathing difficulties and a drop in blood pressure, which may result in loss of consciousness, anaphylaxis and even death.

“While deaths from shellfish [allergy](#) are fortunately rare, the need for constant avoidance creates considerable disruption for many patients, for whom an effective vaccine would be welcomed,” Professor O’Hehir said.

Provided by Monash University

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