

Race linked to childhood food allergies, not environmental allergies

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Research conducted at Henry Ford Hospital shows that race and possibly genetics play a role in children's sensitivity to developing allergies.

Researchers found:

- African-American children were sensitized to at least one food [allergen](#) three times more often than Caucasian children.
- African-American children with one allergic parent were sensitized to an environmental allergen twice as often as African-American children without an allergic parent.

The study will be presented Saturday at the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology annual meeting,

"Our findings suggest that African Americans may have a gene making them more susceptible to food allergen [sensitization](#) or the sensitization is just more prevalent in African American children than white children at age 2," says Haejim Kim, M.D., a Henry Ford [allergist](#) and the study's lead author. "More research is needed to further look at the development of allergy."

Sensitization means a person's immune system produces a specific antibody to an allergen. It does not mean the person will experience [allergy symptoms](#).

According to an AAAI study from 2009-2010, an estimated 8 percent of children have a [food allergy](#), and 30 percent of children have multiple food allergies. Peanut is the most prevalent allergen, followed by milk and shellfish. 1The Henry Ford study consisted of a longitudinal [birth cohort](#) of 543 children who were interviewed with their parents and examined at a clinical visit at age 2. Data included parental self-report of allergies and self-reported race (African American or white/non-Hispanic). The children were skin-tested for three food allergens – egg whites, peanuts and milk – and seven environmental allergens.

Key findings:

- 20.1 percent of African-American children were sensitized to an food allergen compared to 6.4 percent in Caucasian children.
- 13.9 percent of African-American children were sensitized to an environmental allergen compared to 11 percent of Caucasian children.
- African-American children with an allergic parent were sensitized to an environmental allergen 2.45 times more often than African-American children without an allergic parent.

More information: The study was funded by Henry Ford Hospital and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

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