

Study estimates economic impact of childhood food allergies

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The overall cost of childhood food allergies was estimated at nearly \$25 billion annually in a study of caregivers that quantified medical, out-of-pocket, lost work productivity and other expenses, according to a report published by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Food allergy is a growing public health issue in the United States that affects about 8 percent of children. The condition results in significant medical costs to the [health care system](#) but also inflicts substantial costs on families, including special diets and allergen-free foods, according to the study.

Ruchi Gupta, M.D., M.P.H., of the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, and colleagues, surveyed 1,643 caregivers of a child with a [food allergy](#). The most common food allergies were peanut (28.7 percent), milk (22.3 percent) and shellfish (18.6 percent).

Overall food allergy costs were \$24.8 billion annually or \$4,184 per child, according to the results. Total costs included \$4.3 billion in direct medical costs and \$20.5 billion in annual costs to families.

Caregivers estimated that hospitalizations accounted for the largest proportion of direct [medical costs](#) (\$1.9 billion), followed by outpatient visits to allergists (\$819 million), emergency department visits (\$764 million) and pediatrician visits (\$543 million). Special diets and [allergen](#)-free foods were estimated to cost \$1.7 billion annually, while annual lost

labor productivity so caregivers could accompany their children to medical visits was \$773 million, according to the results.

"In summary, childhood food allergy in the United States places a considerable economic burden on families and society. ... Given these findings, research to develop an effective food allergy treatment and cure is critically needed," the study concludes.

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