

Investigators identify new pneumonia epidemic in Beijing

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Mycoplasma pneumoniae infections began rising in Beijing last spring, and by December, this pathogen was found in more than half of hospitalized children suffering from pneumonia in that city, according to investigators from the Capital Institute of Pediatrics, Beijing, China. Now these investigators predict that this epidemic will likely continue well into 2016, and possibly longer. Their data may help clinicians slow the epidemic. The research is published February 24th in the *Journal of Clinical Microbiology*, a publication of the American Society for Microbiology.

From May to December, 2015, the rate of diagnoses positive for *M. pneumoniae* in children nearly doubled, from 30 percent to 57 percent, said Hongmei Sun, MD, a pediatrician who is Director in the Department of Bacteriology, Capital Institute of Pediatrics. As the epidemic continues in Beijing, the investigators predict related outbreaks will occur elsewhere in China, and possibly in other Asian countries, said Sun.

As a result of these findings, Beijing doctors are being advised to be alert for *M. pneumoniae*, said Sun. The news media is publicizing the epidemic, and advising parents to cooperate with diagnosis and treatment, in an effort to stanch the epidemic's spread, she added.

"We have started investigating the rate of *M. pneumoniae* infection in several other regions of China, along with other Chinese *Mycoplasma* experts," said Sun. The researchers are hoping to be able to publish the

resulting data before this coming autumn, in order to use it to help control the epidemic in these other regions, she said.

The foundation of the research is monitoring of the pathogen in children that Sun and collaborators have conducted since 1977. Since then, seven epidemics have taken place in Beijing. In the wake of the 1990 [epidemic](#), a national training course for laboratory diagnosis of *M. pneumoniae* was held in 1992, said Sun.

The investigators have genotyped samples from patients from this and earlier epidemics. Genotyping can help clinicians identify and treat disease, as different genotypes of the same pathogen may produce slightly different symptoms, and different susceptibilities to drugs. One particular genotype, "MLVA4572", appears to harbor drug resistance, said Sun.

Children infected with *M. pneumoniae* typically come down with chest colds. Sore throat, fever, fatigue, headache, and a slowly worsening cough that can last for months are common symptoms, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Children under five typically do not have fevers, but may suffer from vomiting and diarrhea. People at highest risk live or work in crowded conditions, such as schools, hospitals, and dormitories.

Provided by American Society for Microbiology

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