

No increased risk of lung infections among infants using popular anti-reflux medicines

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Mei-Ling Blank. Credit: University of Otago

New University of Otago research shows infants using popular anti-reflux medicines like omeprazole are not at increased risk of pneumonia or other lower respiratory tract infections, contrary to findings from other international studies.

Lead researcher, Mei-Ling Blank from the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine says use of the drugs—proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) - by otherwise healthy [infants](#) is controversial as studies have repeatedly failed to demonstrate the drugs relieve the symptoms of presumed [acid reflux](#) in infants.

"Several large overseas studies have observed an association between the use of PPIs and pneumonia in adults, while two small studies conducted overseas suggested that infants using PPIs may also be at risk of [lung infections](#)," Ms Blank says.

PPIs are commonly prescribed to infants for symptoms attributed to acid reflux or heartburn, with an earlier study by the Otago researchers finding New Zealand has among the highest rates of PPI use by infants internationally.

"Given the high rates of PPI use that one of our earlier studies found, it was important to investigate if infants in New Zealand who were using PPIs were at increased risk of serious lung infections," Ms Blank says.

Co-author of the study, Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology in the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, Dr. Lianne Parkin, says the Otago study was the largest of its kind internationally and was able to address some of the methodological limitations of previous studies.

"Not only did we find a relatively low number of serious lung infections among the children in the cohort, but healthy infants who were currently using PPIs were at no greater risk of a lung [infection](#) than healthy infants

who had stopped taking PPIs," Dr. Parkin says.

The study examined the health records of more than 21,000 New Zealand infants born between January 2005 and December 2012 who were dispensed omeprazole, lansoprazole or pantoprazole at least once before their first birthday. The study was published today in the international *Journal of Paediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition*.

Provided by University of Otago

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