

Pneumonia death rate lower among people who take statins

5 April 2011

Taking statins could help prevent people dying from pneumonia, according to a study by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The researchers found that the risk of death in the six month period after diagnosis of pneumonia was substantially lower among those who were already receiving the cholesterol-lowering drugs compared with those who were not.

Previous studies have suggested that statins may be associated with a more favourable outcome after [bacterial infection](#).

This study, published online in the *BMJ* today, supports a possible protective effect of statins against mortality in patients with pneumonia.

But the researchers point out that as they looked at patients who were already taking the medication when they developed pneumonia, a randomised clinical trial is needed to determine whether starting a statin at the time of diagnosis has a similar effect

Funded by the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council, the team of epidemiologists used data from The Health Improvement Network (THIN), a database of computerised medical records of doctors' practices in the UK, to identify statin users for the study.

They matched each statin user, who were aged over 40 at first prescription of a statin between 1995 and 2006, with up to five non-statin users.

Patients with a record of pneumonia were followed for six months to see if they died and the scientists found that 13% (109 out of 847) of statin users died compared with 20% (578 out of 2927) of non-statin users.

While the study tried to minimise confounding variables, the researchers point out that they

cannot rule out the possibility that unknown differences between [statin](#) users and non-users could have contributed to the results.

Lead author Dr Ian Douglas, lecturer in epidemiology at LSHTM, said: "Statins are safe, cheap, and an easy intervention in terms of delivery.

"Given the potential low number needed to treat to prevent a death suggested by this study, we believe that a strong case exists for randomised trials of statins in people with serious infection to determine if a simple and practical intervention at the point of diagnosis of [pneumonia](#) has a beneficial effect."

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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