

## **Food allergy prevalence stable in Canada**

HAMILTON, ON (7 April 2020)

Researchers from the Allergy, Genes and Environment (AllerGen) Network have released the results of a nationwide study assessing changes in the prevalence of food allergy among Canadians over time.

The study, funded in part by Health Canada, found that 6.1% of Canadians reported having a probable food allergy in 2016 compared to 5.9% of Canadians in 2010, suggesting that the overall prevalence of food allergy remained relatively stable during the six years between surveys.

“Although it has been suspected that the prevalence of food allergy is increasing, ours is the first Canadian study to assess the rates of food allergy over time, and it shows that there has been no change since our 2010 national survey,” said co-lead researcher Dr. Ann Clarke, a professor in the Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary.

The study, *Surveying Prevalence of Food Allergy in All Canadian Environments: SPACE to SPACE*, was published in the [Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice](#). It defined “probable food allergy” as an individual reporting a convincing history of symptoms or a physician diagnosis of a food allergy.

In addition to estimating the number of Canadians affected by food allergy in general, the study provided data on the nine foods most commonly associated with allergies: peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, sesame, milk, egg, wheat and soy.

“While the overall prevalence of probable food allergy has not significantly changed, we did observe an increase in probable milk allergy among children, and in probable milk and wheat allergy among adults,” commented Dr. Clarke. “It’s possible that these increases relate to recent trends toward eliminating milk and gluten from one’s diet, which can produce symptoms of allergy when these nutrients are eventually consumed.”

The current study is based on data collected from 5,874 households, representing 15,322 individuals, including new Canadians, individuals of Indigenous identity, and members of lower-income households. It is the largest survey to date on the prevalence of food allergies in Canada.

“It is essential for Health Canada to understand food allergy prevalence over time to assess the effectiveness of its policies and programs,” commented Dr. Sébastien La Vieille, Senior Scientific Advisor at Health Canada’s Food Directorate and study co-author. “It’s good news that food allergy prevalence remains stable; however, 6% continues to represent a public health concern in Canada.”

“Our research also found that ‘perceived’ or self-reported food allergy prevalence increased to 9.3% from 7.1% in our earlier survey,” said research co-lead Dr. Susan Elliott, a professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the University of Waterloo. “This suggests that Canadians may have become more aware of food allergies in general, leading to an increase in self-reporting, some of which may not be a manifestation of an IgE-mediated clinical allergy.”

“People who suspect they have a food allergy should consult with an allergist to ensure that they are properly diagnosed, treated and managed,” added Dr. Clarke.

“While it is critical to diagnose those who are allergic so that they can avoid potentially life-threatening foods and carry an epinephrine autoinjector, it is also important to avoid mislabelling those who are not allergic so they don’t unnecessarily eliminate foods from their diet.”

### **About AllerGen Inc. (Allergy, Genes and Environment Network)**

[AllerGen Inc.](#) is a former Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life of people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. Funded by the Government of Canada from 2005 to 2019, AllerGen is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON.

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Media contacts:

#### **Kelly Johnston**

Senior Communications Specialist  
Communications and Media Relations, Cumming School of Medicine  
University of Calgary  
403-220-5012  
[kelly.johnston2@ucalgary.ca](mailto:kelly.johnston2@ucalgary.ca)

#### **Matthew Grant**

Director, Media Relations  
University of Waterloo  
519-888-4451  
[matthew.grant@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:matthew.grant@uwaterloo.ca)

#### **Kim Wright**

Director, Communications and Knowledge Mobilization  
AllerGen NCE Inc.  
905-525-9140 ext. 26641  
[kimwright@allergen-nce.ca](mailto:kimwright@allergen-nce.ca)