![AllerGen logo — Allergy, Genes and Environment Network]

For immediate release

Attention: Health/Lifestyle/Science Editors

Breakthrough Canadian Allergy Prevalence Data Published

AllerGen NCE Inc. Researchers Release First Ever Canadian Allergy Prevalence Data

Hamilton, ON (19 July 2010) – With food allergy affecting 7.5% of the Canadian population, representing over 1.9 million people, knowing more about specific allergens is vitally important to improve education, management and protection for food allergic individuals and their families. Groundbreaking food allergy prevalence research was published in the June 2010 issue of *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* (JACI) and provides the first nationwide data on food allergy prevalence (to peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, and sesame) in Canada.

The study, *Surveying Canadians to Assess the Prevalence of Common Food Allergies and Attitudes towards Food Labelling and Risk* (SCAAALAR), launched in 2008, was conducted by AllerGen Investigators, Dr. Ann Clarke, a practicing allergist at McGill University Health Centre and Professor in the Department of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal, and Susan Elliott, PhD, Professor and Dean in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo. AllerGen researchers Drs. Clarke and Elliott designed the study to estimate the prevalence of food allergies responsible for the majority of severe and/or fatal anaphylactic reactions.

Dr. Clarke states, "our study found that a significant gap exists between healthcare providers' and patients' perceptions about proper diagnosis and management of food allergy."

The study is based on data collected from 9,667 individuals across Canada. Study results revealed large disparities between perceived and confirmed food allergies. The allergens that the study looked at - peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, and sesame - are largely responsible for the majority of severe/fatal anaphylactic reactions. Drs. Clarke and Elliott found that the prevalence of probable allergy to at least one of peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, or sesame, which represents a subset of all potential food allergens, in the Canadian population was 3.2%. Individual probable prevalence results of the study were as follows: peanut allergy, 0.93%; tree nut, 1.14%; fish, 0.48%; shellfish, 1.42%; and sesame, 0.09%.

Dr. Clarke also highlighted that, "many people self report having food allergy; however, they have not had the allergy confirmed by their healthcare provider. This finding underscores the importance of proper diagnosis and management of food allergy by a health professional, as many of the study participants with food allergy had experienced at least one repeat reaction and very few had been managed properly." Wider use of confirmatory medical testing could contribute to more accurate diagnosis in those who report they have food allergies.

More...

The study also looked at the attitudes of the general public towards food allergy and the effectiveness of food labelling that alerts consumers to allergens in products. Once published, these findings will be vital in informing consumer safety around food allergy through improved labelling practices in Canada.

The SCAAALAR study is supported by AllerGen NCE Inc. in partnership with Health Canada, McMaster University's Institute of Environment and Health, McGill University Health Centre, Montreal Children's Hospital, Anaphylaxis Canada, Association québécoise des allergies alimentaires, and the Allergy/Asthma Information Association.

AllerGen NCE Inc., the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network, (est. 2004), is a national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life for people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. Funded by Industry Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program, the Network is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton.

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