

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSSIERS DANGEROUSLY COMPLACENT ABOUT FOOD ALLERGY: NEW RESEARCH

New research¹ released today found that Australians are dangerously complacent about food allergy, with experts warning that it increases the risk of an allergic reaction resulting in death.

The study of more than 1,050 Australians found that:

- 56% believe that people with food allergy are over-cautious;
- 86% cannot identify the signs and symptoms of a severe allergic reaction;
- 69% do not know what to do in an emergency; and
- 98% do not know that allergy to any food can be life threatening.

Maria Said, President of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA), says that while food allergy is manageable, sufferers need to be cautious and always know what is in what they eat and drink.

“Even consuming the tiniest amount of a food that you are allergic to can result in a life-threatening reaction in some, so it is essential that the community understands the importance of taking food allergy seriously.”

While most Australians were aware that peanut (80%), shellfish (64%) and seafood (51%) could be life-threatening, dangerously few realised that reactions to other triggers like soy (8%), wheat (12%), milk (12%), sesame (13%), egg (29%), and tree nuts (35%) could also be fatal. And, it is these nine foods that cause 90 per cent of all allergic reactions in Australia.

The new research coincides with Food Allergy Week (17 - 23 May 2015), an initiative designed to help raise awareness about the importance of understanding this potentially life-threatening condition.

“Australia has one of the highest rates of food allergy in the world and hospital admissions for severe allergic reactions have doubled in the last decade.

“Currently, one in 10 babies born in Australia will develop a food allergy, which is approximately 30,000 per year. Understanding how a reaction can occur, the signs and symptoms of food allergy and what to do in an emergency is key.

“We want to educate the whole community. It is up to everyone to be allergy aware. The good news is that the research found that 60% of Australians want to have a better understanding of food allergy.

“In addition to community awareness, the pressing challenges include how to best care for the increased numbers of people at risk of potentially fatal anaphylaxis, upskilling those at the front line of patient care to recognise, manage and treat allergy, and translating the information on emerging risk factors from research studies into public health policy,” explained Ms Said.

To help address these concerns, A&AA together with Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) are calling on the government to recognise allergic disease, including but not limited to food allergy, as a significant chronic disease. They have developed Australia’s first National Allergy Strategy in collaboration with more than 50 key stakeholder organisations.

Dr Raymond Mullins, Chair of the ASCIA Anaphylaxis Committee says that food allergy and anaphylaxis have become an increasing public and personal health burden over the past two decades.

“Food allergy and anaphylaxis contribute to increased demand for medical services, which is a significant economic cost and reduced quality of life for those who suffer a food allergy and their families.

“But there is light at the end of the tunnel. Risk factors for developing food allergy are starting to emerge from research studies. For example, in high-risk children, a recent study showed that the delayed introduction of peanut increased the risk of peanut allergy compared to when it was introduced in the first year of life. We are eagerly awaiting results of further studies like this on other foods.

“While food immunotherapy trials to ‘switch off’ food allergy look promising, they are still in the research stage and require intensive medical and nursing resources that are not currently available. In the meantime, every person with food allergy must have an emergency action plan and should be under the care of a medical practitioner,” concluded Dr Mullins.

For further information please visit www.foodallergyaware.com.au.

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About Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia

A&AA is a charitable, not-for-profit organisation that aims to improve awareness of allergy in the community through education, advocacy and support. A&AA develops a range of educational materials, resources, workshops and seminars. Part of an international alliance of like-minded organisations, A&AA works closely with peak medical bodies including the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA).

About Food Allergy Week

Food Allergy Week is an initiative that aims to increase awareness of food allergy in the community in an effort to promote understanding and help protect those at risk. This year the week takes place from Sunday 17th to Saturday 23rd May 2015 under the theme of *Be Aware. Show You Care*. Be Aware is about raising awareness of the prevalence of food allergy in Australia, that in fact, one in 10 babies born here will develop a food allergy. Show You Care is a call for community support. Head to www.foodallergyaware.com.au for further information and resources.

ⁱ The research was conducted by Galaxy Research and commissioned by Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia between Tuesday 5 May and Thursday 7 May 2015 among 1,050 respondents aged 18 years and older across Australia.