Perceived Food Allergy in Children in 10 European Nations

Background: Food allergy is targeted as a public health priority by the European Union Commission. Parental perception of food allergy in their offspring is a proxy measure of the potential demand for allergy medicine services in the paediatric population. Methods: A representative sample of the general population was contacted by a randomised telephone survey in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland. A standardised questionnaire was administered regarding parentally perceived food allergy reports, symptoms, foods and medical service use by their live-in children. Results: 40,246 adults were polled, yielding data on 8,825 children. Parentally perceived food allergy prevalence was 4.7% (90% CI 4.2–5.2%). The most affected age group was 2- to 3-year olds (7.2%). Single-country incidence ranged between 1.7% (Austria) to 11.7% (Finland). Milk (38.5%), fruits (29.5%), eggs (19.0%) and vegetables (13.5%) were most often implicated, although with significant age-linked variations. Medical treatment was needed by 75.7% of affected children because of a food reaction. This translates into a proxy measure for food allergy prevalence of 3.75%. Skin symptoms were widespread (71.5%), followed by gastrointestinal (27.6%) and respiratory (18.5%) symptoms.

Discussion: We provide the first point...
prevalence of parentally perceived food allergy in the general paediatric population across the European Union. Parental reports confirm the public health significance of adverse reactions to some foods in specified age groups. Our data may inform intervention planning, cost of illness assessments and quality-of-life-enhancing public health measures.

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