

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

About the Study

- The *Surveying Canadians to Assess the Prevalence of Common Food Allergies and Attitudes towards Food Labelling and Risk (SCAAALAR)* study, is the first study to determine the prevalence of severe food allergies among Canadians.
- Findings from SCAAALAR were published in the June 2010 issue of *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (JACI)*.
- The study looked at the prevalence of peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, and sesame allergy in Canada.
- The SCAAALAR study was 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 Investigators

- Principal Co-Investigators for SCAAALAR are Drs Ann Clarke and Susan Elliott.

Ann Clarke, MD, MSc, FRCP (C)

Dr. Ann Clarke is currently a Professor in the Divisions of Clinical Immunology/ Allergy and Clinical Epidemiology in the Department of Medicine, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Susan Elliott, PhD

Susan Elliott, PhD, is currently a Professor and Dean in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo.

Key Findings of the Study

- Some people believed that they had food allergies; however they had not consulted a physician to confirm this.
- Most of the participants with food allergy had at least one repeat reaction, and few reactions were managed appropriately with epinephrine.
 - Wider use of confirmatory medical testing could contribute to more accurate diagnosis and improved management of food allergy.
- 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.

- SCAAALAR findings may lead to translatable economic, health and policy benefits for Canadians.
 - In future, these findings can be used to inform consumer safety and improved public policy through:
 - Food labelling guidelines and regulations;
 - Which food ingredients must be specified on food packaging; and
 - Which food products must be identified by common source names to ensure public recognition of allergenic foods.

Specific Study Findings Re: Prevalence

- Drs. Clarke and Elliott's study found that 3.2% of the Canadian population suffer from *probable* allergy to peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, and sesame.
 - Drs. Clarke and Elliott's study revealed that the prevalence for *probable* allergy to at least one of peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, and sesame for children and adults combined was 3.2%.
 - They study concluded the following *probable* prevalence for individual food allergies: peanut, 0.93%; tree nut, 1.14%; fish, 0.48%; shellfish, 1.42%; and sesame, 0.09%.
 - The study also revealed that the prevalence of peanut allergy in children alone is much higher (1.7%).
 - *Perceived* and *probable* food allergies in the study were estimated at a 95% confidence interval (*i.e.*, the results are highly reliable).
- Participants self-reported food allergy based on three definitions, designed for the purpose of the study: *perceived*, *probable* and *confirmed* food allergy.
 - *Perceived*: included all cases of self-reported food allergy, regardless of history or presence of supporting confirmatory tests.
 - *Probable*: self-reported food allergy with a convincing history of food allergy or who report a physician confirmed food allergy.
 - *Confirmed*: confirmed food allergy through convincing history and physician confirmation or a positive food challenge. (*Note*: For specifics around how confirmed food allergy was considered, please refer to the published article under definitions of food allergy.)

Next Steps

- SCAAALAR surveyed the general Canadian population (9,667 individuals).
- Drs Clarke and Elliott plan to expand their research to include vulnerable populations such as those of lower socioeconomic status and immigrants, as well as explore the role of environmental factors in the cause of food allergies.

About AllerGen NCE Inc.

AllerGen NCE Inc., the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network, (est. 2004), is a national research network funded by Industry Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program.

AllerGen's mandate is to support research, networking, commercialization, knowledge mobilization and capacity building activities that contribute to reducing the morbidity, mortality and socio-economic impacts of allergic diseases.

Through the creation of an enduring network of allergy and immune disease experts, AllerGen intends to radically improve the quality of life for allergy and asthma sufferers. AllerGen-funded research aims to accelerate the development of new diagnostic tests, better medications, and more effective public policies. AllerGen's investments in education and training improve public education, allergy, asthma and anaphylaxis management, and increase the number of medical professionals researching and practicing in these areas.

References

Ben-Shoshan M, Harrington DW, Soller L, Fragapane J, Joseph L, St Pierre Y, Samuel, et al. *A Population-based study on peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, and sesame allergy prevalence in Canada.* **J Allergy and Clinical Immunol** 2010; 125: 1327-1335.

Dr. Ann Clarke (personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Statistics Canada. (1 July 2009). *Population Estimated by Sex and Age Group as of July 1, 2009, Canada.* (Calculation based on age 20 and older). Retrieved 6 June 2010, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/091127/t091127b2-eng.htm>