

# New research links early allergen exposure with lower asthma risk

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New research headed up by a UW-Madison scientist suggests that early exposure to allergens from pets and other sources can decrease the risk of developing asthma.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 8 percent of American children have asthma. And in Wisconsin, 10 percent of adults and over 7 percent of children have the disease, according to the state Dept. of Health Services.

Asthma kills one person in Wisconsin every five days, DHS says, with emergency room visits coming much more frequently for young children, African Americans, Native Americans and Hispanics.

Previous studies have shown that reducing allergens in the home helps keep established asthma under control; the findings from this new study suggest that exposure occurring before asthma ever develops might have a preventive effect.

The ongoing Urban Environment and Childhood Asthma study is funded by NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases through its Inner-City Asthma Consortium.

“Our observations imply that exposure to a broad variety of indoor allergens, bacteria and bacterial products early in life may reduce the risk of developing asthma,” said James Gern, the principal investigator of URECA and a professor at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. “Additional research may help us identify specific targets for asthma prevention strategies.”

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