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MEDIA RELEASE

INCREASE IN FOOD ALLERGY-RELATED PRESENTATIONS OF CHILDREN TO VICTORIAN HOSPITALS

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THE demand for emergency services associated with food allergy-related problems in Victorian children increased during 2005–15, but the reasons for the increase are unclear, according to the authors of a research letter published online today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Researchers from the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute analysed Victorian Emergency Minimum Dataset (VEMD) data for the period 2005–06 to 2014–15. The VEMD is a statewide administrative dataset that includes non-identifiable patient-level data for all Victorian public emergency department encounters. They included all food allergy-related presentations by children and young people aged 0–19 years.

"The number of children presenting to emergency departments with food allergy-related problems increased from 2368 in 2005–06 to 4263 in 2014–15; the presentation rate increased from 18 to 29 per 10 000 population," wrote the authors, led by Professor Harriet Hiscock, Director of the Royal Children's Hospital Health Services Research Unit and Group Leader, Health Services, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

"About half the children who presented with food allergy-related problems were aged 0–4 years, the rate for this age group increasing from 38 to 55 per 10 000 population. The proportion of presentations triaged as being more urgent (triage categories 1–3) also increased, from 51% to 63%.

"The rate of presentations to metropolitan hospitals increased more (from 18 per 10 000 in 2005–06 to 32 per 10 000 in 2014–15; 78% increase) than did the rate for rural hospitals (26 per 10 000 in 2005–06 to 36 per 10 000 in 2014–15; 38% increase).

"The increase was particularly marked for children aged 0–4 years and for children and young people in the North-West Melbourne and Southern Melbourne regions," the authors concluded.

"While the reason for the increased burden is not clear — that is, whether the prevalence of allergy had increased (including because of a change in population composition), management plans had changed, or access to community services was reduced — the consequence is greater demand on emergency services across Melbourne."

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