GP STUDY LINKS WHOOPING COUGH VACCINE TO ASTHMA

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Children who are immunised against whooping cough are 50 per cent more likely to develop asthma, eczema and hay fever in later life, according to new unpublished study results from general practice.

The results also suggest these allergic disease are three times more likely to occur in children who receive antibiotics in early life.

Dr Julian Hopkin, a chest consultant from Churchill Hospital, Oxford, carried out a retrospective study involving 1,934 patients, representing the 1975/84 cohort at an Oxfordshire GP practice, in order to examine the relationship between childhood infections and the development of subsequent atopic asthma, hay fever and eczema.

After adjusting for medical and social variables, Dr Hopkin discovered pertussis immunisations, the receipt of broad-spectrum antibiotics in the first two years of life and maternal atopy each represented an independent risk factor for development of allergy in later life.

'In this population (these) three independent variables were found to consistently predict the development of subsequent asthma, hay fever and eczema- the associations were not explained by other variables,' he said.

Dr Seif Shaheen, a lecturer in public health medicine at the United Medical and Dental School, London, is currently analysing data examining links between common childhood vaccines and subsequent atopy, involving the follow-up of 9,000 people up to 26 years old from a 1970 national birth cohort.

He told Pulse: 'Researchers are interested in looking at pertussis vaccine to see whether it has contributed to the marked increase in the prevalence of childhood asthma, eczema and hay fever over the past 20-30 years.

'Laboratory tests show the vaccine is capable of promoting IgE production. There is no clear evidence in epidemiological studies to link pertussis vaccine to allergy in individuals.

Source: Informed Parent summer 1998

Farooqi IS, et al. Early childhood infection and atopic disorder. Thorax. 1998 Nov;53(11):927-32. PMID: 10193389; UI: 99209469

[Vaccination]