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Special Article

Consensus communication on early peanut introduction and the prevention of peanut allergy in high-risk infants

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Abbreviations used: EAACI, European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology; LEAP, Learning Early About Peanut Allergy; NIAID, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; NNT, Number needed to treat; SPT, Skin prick test.

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for Allergology, Society for Pediatric Dermatology, and World Allergy Organization. More formal guidelines regarding early-life, complementary feeding practices and the risk of allergy development will follow in the next year from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases-sponsored Working Group and the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

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Introduction and Rationale

Peanut allergy is an increasingly troubling global health problem affecting between 1% and 3% of children in many westernized countries. Although multiple methods of measurement have been used and specific estimates differ, there appears to have been a sudden increase in the number of cases in the past 10- to 15-year period, suggesting that the prevalence might have tripled in some countries, such as the United States. Extrapolating the currently estimated prevalence, this translates to nearly 100,000 new cases annually (in the United States and United Kingdom), affecting some 1 in 50 primary school-aged children in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. A similar increase in incidence is now being noted in developing countries, such as Ghana. 1-6

The purpose of this brief communication is to highlight emerging evidence for existing allergy prevention guidelines regarding potential benefits of supporting early rather than delayed peanut introduction during the period of complementary food introduction in infants. A recent study entitled "Randomized trial of peanut consumption in infants at risk for peanut allergy" demonstrated a successful 11% to 25% absolute reduction in the risk of peanut allergy in high-risk infants (and a relative risk reduction of up to 80%) if peanut was introduced between 4 and 11 months of age. In light of the significance of these findings, this document serves to better inform the decision-making process for health care providers regarding such potential benefits of early peanut introduction. More formal guidelines regarding early-life, complementary feeding practices and the risk of allergy development will follow in the next

year from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)—sponsored Working Group and the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), and thus this document should be considered interim guidance.

Summary of New Evidence

In the Learning Early About Peanut Allergy (LEAP) trial, 640 high-risk United Kingdom infants (see Box 1) between the ages of 4 and 11 months were randomized to consume peanut products at least 3 times a week (6 g of peanut protein, which is equivalent to 24 g peanuts or 3 teaspoons of peanut butter per week) or to completely avoid peanut products for the first 5 years of life. This included 542 infants found to have negative skin prick test (SPT) responses to peanut at study entry and 98 infants with SPT wheal diameters to peanut of between 1 and 4 mm (minimally positive SPT response) at study entry. An additional 76 children were excluded from study entry before randomization based on a SPT response of greater than 5 mm, which was assumed to result in a very high likelihood of reacting to a peanut challenge. In an intention-to-treat analysis 17.2% in the peanut avoidance group compared with 3.2% in the peanut consumption group had food challenge-proved peanut allergy by age 5 years, corresponding to a 14% absolute risk reduction, a number needed to treat (NNT; eg, the number of persons needed to be treated for one to receive benefit) of 7.1, and a relative risk reduction of 80%.

When examined in further detail, the isolated beneficial effects for both the primary and secondary prevention of peanut allergy

Box 1. Enrollment criteria used in the LEAP trial

Infants considered at "high risk" as defined by the LEAP study criteria:

Egg allergy: Children with either:

1. A SPT wheal diameter \geq 6 mm from exposure to raw hen's egg white and no history of previous egg tolerance

OR

2. A SPT wheal diameter ≥3 mm from exposure to pasteurized hen's egg white and allergic symptoms related to exposure to hen's egg

Severe eczema: An eczematous rash that:

1. Requires application of topical creams, ointments, or both containing corticosteroids or calcineurin inhibitors and that, if the participant is <6 months of age, lasted for at least 12 of 30 days on 2 occasions or, if the participant is >6 months of age, lasted for at least 12 of 30 days on 2 occasions in the last 6 months

OR

2. Is currently or was previously graded ≥40 by using the modified SCORAD evaluation

Example of SPT method used in the LEAP trial

- SPTs to peanut extract should be performed in the presence of a negative control and a positive histamine control.
- SPTs should be performed in duplicate, and the maximum wheal diameter of the 2 SPT responses should be calculated and rounded up to the greatest whole millimeter. Of note, in the LEAP trial measurement of IgE to peanut resulted in considerably higher rates of sensitization compared with skin testing, which could lead to numerous unnecessary oral peanut challenges.

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