

## **Food Allergies – Why Isn't There a Vaccine?**

As you read this article with your breakfast or lunch, more than 11 million Americans are carefully watching what they eat and how their food is prepared. You may be thinking that they are trying to lose weight, but that's not the reason – it's because they suffer from life-threatening food allergies.

The statistics are frightening – particularly among children. Each year, allergic reactions result in 30,000 emergency room visits and over 150 deaths. The average school has 10 children suffering from food allergies. Between 1997 and 2002, the number of children under age five who suffer from food allergies actually doubled.

Food allergies are a disease, and there is no cure. The only recourse is total avoidance of the foods that generally cause these allergies – everyday foods like milk, peanuts, eggs and shellfish. This is easier said than done. If your child attends a birthday party, the home-made milk- and egg-free chocolate chip cookies may have been baked in a pan that once cooked peanut brownies. Or perhaps her classmate spills a drop of milk on the school bus – if she touches or even inadvertently smells that dried drop, it could cause her severe harm. The favorite family restaurant? Out of the question for most people with severe food allergies.

Everywhere you go and everything you do, you must be on guard. One slip-up could be fatal.

Why have scientists been unable to develop a cure to a disease that has become so prevalent? It's not for lack of trying, and it's not for lack of hope. Using existing science developed to treat asthma, airborne allergens and bee sting allergies, researchers are confident that a vaccine for major food allergies can be found within a decade if the research receives sufficient funding.

And that's the catch – funding. Our federal government must treat this disease with greater urgency by dedicating needed funding to finding a cure. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) spends less than \$10 million per year on food allergy research; by comparison, Attention Deficit Disorder receives \$107 million and Diabetes receives \$1.2 billion per year. These are all important diseases that deserve attention but clearly research funding is out of balance.

Michigan has two Members of Congress currently serving on the Appropriations Committee, which makes initial recommendations about how federal funds are spent. Please take a moment to contact Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick (D-Detroit) and Congressman Joe Knollenberg (R-Farmington Hills) and urge them to support efforts to increase funding for food allergy research.

Please send the following simple message to our congressional representatives: *It is much more cost-effective to fund needed research than to continue asking families and schools to unilaterally shoulder the burden of this burgeoning public health danger.*

*Congress should take action now to help millions of American families and children who live in constant fear -- and give them hope that soon they, too, can enjoy a carefree meal while they read the newspaper.* Personalize this message with YOUR family's experiences and your hopes that, as our elected representatives, they will support increased funding for this important research in their roles as members of the Appropriations Committee.

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