

MEDIA RELEASE

BCG Vaccine Stops People Developing Asthma - April 2003

Researchers have discovered that people with a family history of allergies, who receive the BCG (TB) vaccine during infancy, are protected against developing asthma later on in life.

Researchers at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research tested children aged between 7 and 14 years from two Sydney districts whose mothers were born in South-East Asia. One district had received the BCG vaccine in infancy and the other had not.

The BCG vaccine is a live vaccine used to protect people against the serious consequences of tuberculosis. It is used extensively in countries with a high prevalence of tuberculosis but has been little used in Australia.

Whilst this study does not recommend the use of the BCG vaccine to protect people against asthma it does show that exposure to infectious agents soon after birth, when the immune system is developing and it is first exposed to allergens in the environment, may have effects that are evident many years later.

Dr Guy Marks, Head of Epidemiology, Woolcock Institute of Medical Research, said "This research study helps us understand more about the mechanisms involved in developing asthma and allergies. Further research is needed to better understand what it is about the BCG vaccine (and other infections) that leads to this apparent protection.

"It is hoped that these studies will lead us to identify effective ways to prevent asthma."