

Dr. AUSTRALIAN DOCTOR NEWS

GP tackles delayed allergen intake in infants

Text messages are making a real difference, says Dr Alan Leeb

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The safe introduction of peanut and other food allergens to infants is being monitored as part of a new nationwide GP project to promote best practice in reducing allergy.

The project — which trials a text message reporting system called SmartStart Allergy — is making a “real difference”, says its instigator, Perth GP Dr Alan Leeb, who founded the similar SmartVax vaccine safety program.



Dr Alan Leeb.

He collaborated on the allergy project with the National Allergy Strategy and Perth Children’s Hospital Foundation, and presented preliminary data at the RACGP conference in Adelaide last month.

So far, the project has enrolled 70 general practices and collected data on almost 10,000 infants.

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About half of the infants were assigned to the intervention group, in which their parents received an SMS requesting information on solid food introduction at six, nine and 12 months.

Later, they also got a message advising that peanut butter should be introduced before 12 months, along with a link to the Nip Allergies In The Bub website.

The remainder of the parents were controls, receiving a single SMS at 12 months asking if they had introduced peanut.

The difference in the proportion of parents in the intervention versus controls group who had introduced nuts and soy before 12 months was “striking”, Dr Leeb said.

Preliminary analysis of a small sample suggested that almost all of those in the intervention group (98%) had introduced peanut by 12 months, compared with 90% in the control arm.

The most common parent-reported infant reactions were as expected, including rash around the mouth, stomach pain, vomiting, hives or welts.

Australia had one of the highest rates of food allergy worldwide, affecting an estimated one in 10 children, Dr Leeb said.

“Early introduction of allergenic foods is our most promising strategy for preventing food allergy,” he added.

“Our big challenge now is, now that we have identified a group of ‘peanut hesitant’ parents, we need to facilitate safe introduction of peanut to those children, whether that be in the home environment, GP facilitated or through facilitated early referral for medically supervised food challenges.”

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