



July 2012 Edition

Dogs help guard against respiratory virus, study finds

Dogs may cause some to cough and sneeze, however a new study says pets may actually help curb allergies and asthma. According to a new study conducted by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, house dust containing protective factors against a common respiratory virus associated with the development of asthma in children, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), appears to lower the risk for asthma.

As Kei Fujimura, a researcher from the Colitis and Crohn's Disease Center of the Division of Gastroenterology at University of California, San Francisco, California and one of the researchers of the study, comments:

"In this study we found that feeding mice house dust from homes that have dogs present protected them against a childhood airway infectious agent, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). RSV infection is common in infants and can manifest as mild to severe respiratory symptoms. Severe infection in infancy is associated with a higher risk of developing childhood asthma."

To determine a link, if any, between pet ownership and a decreased risk for asthma, the researchers compared the house dust from homes with a dog to homes without pets by comparing three groups of mice: (1) Mice fed house dust from homes with dogs before being infected with RSV, (2) mice infected with RSV without exposure to dog-associated house dust, and (3) a control group of mice not infected with RSV.

The mice who were fed the dog-associated house dust were

protected against severe RSV infections, which in turn decreased the risk for asthma.

The results of the present study are important for the future of asthma research. The findings may help to develop treatments for RSV, which may decrease the risk for asthma among children.

To control an existing allergy to dogs, it is recommended to bathe the pet at least once or twice a week with a special shampoo that neutralizes dander and odours.



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