



To News Editor  
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新聞稿 PRESS RELEASE

### **Doctors sound warning on royal jelly hypersensitivity and asthma prevalence**

Royal jelly, widely used as a health tonic, should be taken with precautions in those with a history of allergy, a University doctor and researcher said today.

Dr. Roland Leung, Lecturer in Medicine at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, was speaking at a press conference marking the opening of the First Hong Kong Allergy Forum.

"The claimed benefits of royal jelly remained unproven, but adverse reactions including severe asthma attacks, anaphylaxis and even death have been associated with its ingestion," he said, adding that an 11-year-old in Sydney died last year after taking royal jelly.

Dr. Leung has teamed up with Australian researchers to investigate royal jelly allergy in the past two years. They have since identified a number of "culprit" protein components in royal jelly, which could be linked to allergic reactions.

In a questionnaire survey on the prevalence of royal jelly allergy locally, Dr. Leung found that nearly one-third (31.2%) of the 1,509 respondents had taken it. Nine respondents reported developing allergic reactions -- including hives, eczema, watery and itchy eyes, runny nose and breathing difficulties -- shortly after taking royal jelly. One of them even had an acute asthma attack, and required medication.

Presenting latest findings of the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood

(ISAAC) in the Western Pacific region at the Forum, Dr. Christopher Lai, Senior Lecturer in Medicine at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, warned that there had been genuine increase in the prevalence of such diseases in Hong Kong.

"Although the precise causes of asthma and allergic diseases are still unclear, research data suggested that asthma prevalence is higher in more affluent countries," he said.

In a survey of 4,600 Hong Kong youngsters aged between 13 and 14, 12.4% were found to be suffering from asthma. This was second only to Japan (13.2%) and much higher than the prevalence in three other countries under survey -- the Philippines (12.3%), Singapore (9.7%) and China (3.1% - 5.1%).

The prevalence of rhinitis ( nose allergy ) in Hong Kong also stood highest at 44.5%, when compared with Singapore (41.1%), Japan (40.7%), Malaysia (29.1%), the Philippines (27%) and China (20.5% - 33.7%).

Dr. Lai also studied the changes in prevalence over time among first-year Chinese University students and found that asthma prevalence had risen to 7.6% in 1994 from 4.6% in 1989. The use of asthma medications also increased to 7.7% from 5.3%, and severity of asthma as indicated by a history of waking due to breathlessness to 21.8% from 11.3%.

Note to Editors:

Drs. Christopher Lai and Ronald Leung will be present at a press conference marking the opening of the Forum today at 12:30 pm in Tang Room, Level 3 of the Hong Kong Sheraton Hotel and Towers in Tsimshatsui.