DAILY MAIL (London)

August 16, 2011 Tuesday

HIDDEN TORMENT OF **NUT ALLERGY** CHILDREN  
  
**BYLINE:** BY FIONA MACRAE SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT  
  
**LENGTH:** 636 words

CHILDREN with potentially deadly **nut** **allergies** are being bullied for being different, say researchers.

And their parents are stigmatised as 'neurotic and attention-seeking' by other parents, they found.

Relatives of some victims of the condition are even suspected of deliberately giving a child nuts to check they really are allergic.

Overall, the impact of a **nut** **allergy** is so great that it could be considered a disability, the Leicester University researchers found.

They interviewed 26 families from the Leicester area about their experiences.

Some children told how they were bullied by classmates, who taunted them about their allergy and threatened to trigger it.

Other youngsters were stigmatised at lunchtime, when they sat apart from other youngsters who had brought peanut butter sandwiches with them.

Some of the parents were so worried about their children coming into contact with peanuts that they stopped them from going to birthday parties or eating out.

Others felt they had no option but to hover over them at parties Ð when they experienced prejudice themselves.

The researchers said: 'Parents vividly described how not everyone accepted it as an authentic condition with potentially deadly implications, instead seeing it as a **frivolous** and self-indulgent fad invented and maintained by neurotic, attention-seeking people.

This meant that parents struggled to preserve their own identity as sensible, credible people who deserved to be taken seriously.'

Research leader Professor Mary Dixon-Woods said: 'In many ways **nut** **allergy** may be considered a form of disability because of the ways in which it imposes social barriers on participating fully in society.'

**Nut** **allergies** are on the rise, with up to one in 50 children in the UK allergic to peanuts.

This makes it the most common serious allergy.

Reactions can range from mild itching and rashes to life-threatening breathing problems which kill an average of seven children a year.

**Nut** **allergies** are usually diagnosed in the first two years of life and parents are told to keep their children away from all types of nuts and traces of nuts and to carry a 'pen' that holds a shot of adrenaline.

According to the study, which is published in the journal Chronic Illness, even family members could not always be trusted.

In some cases elderly relatives suffered memory lapses, but other relations were suspected of giving the children nuts just to check they really did have an allergy.

Professor Dixon-Woods said: 'Families of a child with a **nut** **allergy** are very well-briefed and know what to ask of the people they are visiting.

Our study shows, however, that sometimes people don't take always this advice very seriously and can be careless.'

But others defended parents of allergy-free children.

They said that often they are scared a child with an allergy will have a reaction when visiting their home.

In addition, while it is easy to avoid serving bagged nuts, even well-meaning friends can be unaware that nuts are a hidden ingredient in many foods.

JAMIE Berry's peanut allergy causes such concern to his mother that she accompanies him to all his friends' birthday parties.

Rachel Berry also takes a supply of nut-free food to the party, and even alternative prizes for games such as pass the parcel.

Jamie, six, can't eat ice lollies because many are produced in factories that use nuts.

When he has a reaction, his face becomes swollen and covered in a rash that closes his eyes.

Mrs Berry, 43, an accountant from Gloucestershire, said that while Jamie's school friends readily accept his allergy, some parents do not.

Mrs Berry, a member of charity Allergy UK, said: 'I do think that he is missing out on play dates Ð his little brother gets asked to more.

I know some mums have said that they'd love to have him round but they just can't cope with it.'