

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN STUDY LINKS ASTHMA AND PNEUMONIA

DALLAS – Feb. 25, 2002 – Long-term infection with a bacteria that causes pneumonia could lead to chronic asthma, UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researchers report in the February issue of *Infection and Immunity*.

Most people recover completely from pneumonia. Doctors have known for a long time, however, that *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* bacteria can linger in humans months after the acute infection has subsided. Scientists have hypothesized that chronic respiratory infection caused by the bacteria played a role in asthma since laboratory cultures find more of the bacteria present in asthmatics than in people without asthma. Doctors also have found *M. pneumoniae* present in patients suffering from severe asthma attacks.

The current study presents scientific evidence that links the bacteria and asthma.

Dr. R. Doug Hardy, assistant professor of internal medicine, and colleagues studied mice infected with *M. pneumoniae*. Eighteen months after infection, some mice showed remnants of the bacteria and many of those mice had developed bronchial constriction that commonly causes asthma attacks.

“These findings provide strong evidence supporting the postulated association between *M. pneumoniae* infection and chronic pulmonary disease, possibly asthma, in humans,” the investigators wrote.

The researchers said the study also indicates that anti-microbial treatment of acute *M. pneumoniae* respiratory infection may be a way to improve wheezing and poor lung function, and thus lessen the risk of later developing of asthma.

Other UT Southwestern researchers involved in the study included Dr. Hasan Jafri, assistant professor of pediatrics; Dr. George McCracken, professor of pediatrics; Dr. Octavio Ramilo, associate professor of pediatrics; and Dr. Beverly B. Rogers, associate professor of pathology.

The study was funded by Abbott Laboratories and the American Lung Association.

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