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RESPIRATORY INFECTION IN CHILDREN, ETS EXPOSURE, SOCIAL FACTORS AND DIET

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Background. Respiratory infections in children is an important medical and social problem. Apart from the causative agents, microbes, previous studies have shown that contacts with other children, ETS exposure, social class and air pollution are risk factors. No extensive studies have been published on the importance of diet factors.

Material and methods. A questionnaire study was made on a random sample of 90 4-5 year old children, visiting the Health service center in Geneva for their regular checkup before starting school. The mothers answered a questionnaire asking about size of family, mother's and father's smoking habits, consumption of various food items on a frequency basis and how often they had cough, bronchitis and pneumonia.

Results. There was a significant positive correlation between attending day care centers and the frequency of cough. The number of rooms in the flat/house was negatively correlated to the frequency of cough and bronchitis. There were no significant relationships between ETS exposure and any of the respiratory diseases. For diet factors, the strongest correlations were found between the consumption of eggs and cold ($p=0.002$), cough ($p=0.017$) and bronchitis ($p=0.003$). There were also significant relationships between these diseases and the consumption of chicken, yoghurt and milk desserts. No correlations were found between the diseases and consumption of vegetables.

Conclusions. The results are based on a food frequency questionnaire and the results must be evaluated with caution. The data suggest, however, that there is a relation between consumption of certain proteins and the risk for respiratory infectious disease in children. Diet factors must be taken into considerations in studies on the relation between environmental agents and respiratory infectious disease in children.

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