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Childhood allergies and wheezing may be det in the womb

22 October 2010

A child's chances of developing allergies or wheezing is related they grow at vital stages in the womb, according to Medical Res Council (MRC) funded scientists at the University of Southampto

The new research, also supported by the British Lung Foundati reveals that fetuses which develop quickly in early pregnancy b later on in pregnancy are likely to go on to develop allergies an as children. Scientists believe this is due to changes in the deve of their immune system and lungs.

A fetus that grows too slowly in the womb is also more likely to an infant who wheezes with common colds, possibly as a resul narrower airways in its lungs.

Professor Keith Godfrey, Professor of Epidemiology and Human Development at the University of Southampton and lead autho study, said:

"Childhood allergies and asthma have become an epidemic in dev countries over the last 50 years. This research shows that in or combat this, we need to understand more about how babies dev the womb.

"We already know that a baby's growth in the womb has an imp influence on susceptibility to obesity and heart disease in later li this research provides some of the most direct evidence yet tha changes in how the baby's immune system and lungs develop b birth can predispose them to some of the commonest childhood illnesses."

The scientists from the MRC Lifecourse Epidemiology Unit and U of Southampton, based at Southampton General Hospital, stud than 1,500 three year-old children who were taking part in the Southampton Women's Survey, a large study of women and th children.

The team discovered that 27% of children who had developed c early pregnancy but faltered later in pregnancy were sensitive common allergens (atopy), compared to 4% of children who gr normal rate. A combination of allergy and wheezing conditions much more likely in children with the rapid-slow growth pattern womb.

Professor Stephen Holgate, from the Medical Research Council,

"Unravelling the complex interplay between immunity and diseas the course of a person's life, including before they are even born core part of the MRC's research strategy. Furthering our underst of the body's natural resilience is critical to developing new adva the treatment of infectious diseases, autoimmune diseases and

allergies."