

Dogs May Reduce Babies' Wheezing Risk

Study says infants in homes with multiple dogs breathe easier.

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Living in a home with multiple dogs may help reduce an infant's risk for developing wheezing in the first year of life, according to a study in the December issue of the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

Researchers at the University of Cincinnati found that infants living in homes with high levels of endotoxins and multiple dogs were more than two times less likely to wheeze than other infants.

Endotoxins are natural compounds secreted from disease-causing agents such as bacteria. Scientists say endotoxins can stimulate immune systems in various ways.

The team analyzed the effects of pet ownership and endotoxin exposure in 520 infants enrolled in a five-year childhood allergy and air pollution study who were at greater risk for developing allergies because at least one parent had known allergies.

"Our research presents evidence that pet ownership offers a protective effect against development of lower respiratory symptoms in young children," lead researcher Dr. David Bernstein said in a news release announcing the findings.

Bernstein said the researchers don't know why the endotoxin-multiple dog combination seems to have a protective effect on infants and that further research is needed to determine if these early protective effects have long-term benefits.