



Coughs, Colds and Wheezes

in Leicestershire children

The largest study of breathing problems in toddlers in Europe!

April 2001

I. Why did we set up this study?

Coughs, colds and wheezes are common in young children and cause many hospital admissions to the Leicester Royal Infirmary. In spite of this, doctors know little about the less severe breathing problems in this age group. We don't know for example which children are likely to grow out of their troubles and which children will have asthma later in life. As our questionnaires are filled out by parents and not by doctors, the study also gives us important information on healthy children, who rarely need to go to the doctor.

II. How many children take part?

In April 1998, we sent 8700 questionnaires to parents of children aged between 1 and 4 years. Over 6800 families sent the questionnaire back completed. This is a very large number and the study therefore gives us lots of vital information on all the common breathing troubles in children.

III. How were the children chosen?

The addresses of the children were chosen at random from all families living in Leicestershire. We did not know in advance which ones were having breathing problems. In fact, most children in this survey are very healthy.

IV. What happens with the questionnaires?

The questionnaires will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Only the answers to the questions (but not names or addresses) will be entered into a computer and then analysed anonymously. None of the individual results will be given to other people (not even to the child's doctor or to the hospital).

V. What have we found out already?

Some families have filled in several questionnaires for their child. By comparing these, we have found that the information given by parents is very reliable and their memory of earlier illnesses is very good. This encouraged us to continue the study.

We also found that less severe breathing problems are very common in young children: up to one in five children had used an inhaler for treating wheeze within the previous year. Children of South Asian families reported roughly the same amount of breathing problems as children of white families.

Some of the results of the 1998 study will be published this year in The Lancet, which is one of the best known weekly papers for doctors in Europe! The high quality of the information given by all the families involved has led to our article being chosen by this renowned journal! Doctors can then read the results of the Leicestershire study, and this will eventually help them to prevent and treat breathing problems in children. At the same time the results are likely to be reported by the British daily newspapers.