



NACC Media Release

4th October 2004

MAP and Crohn's Disease

4th October 2004, St Albans: The Daily Express today reports that a group of patients with Crohn's Disease are seeking compensation from the Government claiming that 'Whitehall departments failed to act' to prevent the spread of the MAP bacterium in cow's milk.

Richard Driscoll, Director of NACC, the National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease, commented:

The question of whether MAP causes Crohn's Disease is a very important one because of the potential public health issues and because that knowledge would help to prevent more people developing this distressing disease. This is why NACC commissioned an independent expert group to review the evidence for MAP as a cause of Crohn's Disease and to suggest what further research is needed. Their findings were that:

- evidence shows that MAP is present in milk and, possibly, water supplies,
- it should be accepted that MAP DNA is present in the tissues of some people with Crohn's Disease, but, since it is also present in the tissues of a smaller number of people who do not have Crohn's, the significance of the presence of the DNA in terms of the cause of Crohn's Disease is unknown
- based on the available evidence, there is no proof at present that MAP causes Crohn's Disease.
- DEFRA's precautionary strategy to reduce the incidence of MAP in the food chain is to be welcomed.

On the basis of this Review NACC wrote to both DEFRA and the Department of Health to support the implementation of the precautionary strategy and the need for further research.

The NACC Review Group identified three elements of research as being needed to resolve the question of whether MAP causes Crohn's,

1. Any future research into the link between MAP and Crohn's should take account of the different clinical and genetic profiles of Crohn's patients, as it seems increasingly likely that there may be more than one trigger for the disease and that some people may be more genetically susceptible to particular triggers than others.
2. The completion of the Australian trial of treating Crohn's Disease with antibiotics targeted at MAP should provide additional evidence – results expected in 2005.

National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease

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3. Ideally, population-based or epidemiological studies are needed which include data on the genetic sub-types of Crohn's Disease. These would need to be large-scale to identify the relatively small numbers of individuals who are potentially susceptible.

In the meantime, if anyone is particularly concerned about the possibility of MAP causing Crohn's Disease, then they could opt to buy one of the non-dairy alternatives or UHT milk instead of pasteurised milk. Whilst there is no research to prove that UHT milk is completely free of MAP, it is generally assumed that the much higher temperatures used to sterilise UHT milk destroys more, if not all, of the MAP.

For patients who have Crohn's Disease, maintaining bone density is an important issue, and if they stop drinking milk calcium supplements might be needed. NACC suggests that they should discuss this with their doctor.

Additional information for Editors:

The Report of the Expert Review Group on MAP and Crohn's Disease is available from the NACC website at www.nacc.org.uk/MAPreport

The NACC Information Service responds to individual enquiries on any aspect of Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's Disease. The service is open from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm Monday to Friday on **0845 130 2233**

There is no national database of people who have Crohn's Disease. The British Society of Gastroenterology estimates that up to 60,000 people in the United Kingdom live with the condition and 6,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. (Source: IBD Guidelines 2004 – www.bsg.org)

For more press information on NACC or Colitis and Crohn's Disease, please contact:
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