



**For immediate release  
16 Sept 2007**

**“Are Paranoid Parents Damaging Children’s Immune Systems?”**

Parents could be unwittingly affecting their child’s immune system in the early years of their life due to popular misconceptions about bacteria. A new survey<sup>1</sup> out today reveals that six out of ten people think it’s important to protect children from exposure to all bacteria not realising that some exposure is crucial in developing a child’s immune system.

A baby’s first exposure to immune-boosting bacteria is usually in the birth canal, so the rise in caesarean births<sup>2</sup> and decline in breastfeeding<sup>3</sup> (which helps promote the growth of protective gut bacteria) could have a knock on effect on the early education of the immune system, resulting in poorly developed immune systems in the young. As children grow older, many of today’s parents are obsessed with keeping them in a sterile bubble of antibacterial wipes, sprays and antibiotics. According to the research by Yakult (1), 73% of people claim they think it is important to protect ourselves from bacteria and bacterial infections with antibacterial products.

This misunderstanding of bacteria is clear from the fact that 42% of people believe society’s health would improve if we managed to eliminate all bacteria. 67% of people have also come to believe that bacteria are dangerous however what many people don’t seem to understand is that bacteria can be beneficial and in fact there would be no life on earth without its existence. Professor Ken Jones, immunologist at Cardiff School of Health Sciences, says this study demonstrates the ‘germ warfare’ that could be affecting children’s immune systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Survey of 1006 adults conducted by ICM research, September 2007

<sup>2</sup> Michel Odent (2004). *The Caesarean*. London: Free Association Books Ltd

<sup>3</sup> Rautava S, Kalliomäki M, Isolauri E (2002). Probiotics during pregnancy and breast-feeding might confer immunomodulatory protection against atopic disease in the infant. *J Allergy Clin Immunol*. Jan;109(1):119-2. 1

Prof Jones says: “With the huge media attention around dangerous bacteria such as MRSA, the marketing-hype pushing total annihilation of bacteria via wipes or sprays, coupled with the dangerous reliance of antibiotics for almost any infection, there is a real concern that we are misunderstanding bacteria and the vital role some bacteria can play in our overall health and wellbeing and the development of our young.”

His argument is that the lifestyle of today’s society is increasingly affecting immune systems: “The Playstation generation no longer play outside with plenty of other kids as they used to; we live in smaller families and in less rural locations – all these factors mean children are less exposed to the variety of bacteria they used to be which is crucial to develop the immune system.”

**So should we be rolling our children in mud or wrapping them up in cotton-wool? Here are Professor Jones’ top tips to boost you and your child’s immunity at this key time of year:**

1. Strike the right balance between cleanliness and obsessiveness. When it comes to cleaning use commonsense - your home should be clean and hygienic but there is no need to disinfect or bleach it from top to bottom.
2. Playing outside, mixing with other children and getting dirty is actually good for kids – they get exercise, build their immunity – and have fun!
3. Ensure children learn important lessons about washing their hands – good old soap and water is important - but there is no need to anti-bacterialise’ them.
4. Encourage them to eat plenty of fruit and veg – and where possible make it organic as the lack of chemicals killing off all the bacteria on these foods mean the food exists in its natural and most healthy state
5. Antibiotic use should be limited - especially within the first year of life. There is a reason your doctor does not immediately prescribe antibiotics and you shouldn’t pressurise them to. If you or your children do have to take antibiotics then it is important

to restore the balance of good bacteria. Probiotics, like Yakult work by topping up the levels of beneficial bacteria.

6. Parents are continually at risk of picking up whatever their children get – ensure you support your own immune system or you will end of in a continual cycle of being off work for the kids and then off work yourself

7. Be aware of the important role good bacteria has to play in boosting your immune system and take a daily probiotic - studies have shown that the good bacteria in Yakult survive the journey through the gut. And a stronger gut leads to stronger natural defences.

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#### **Notes to Editors**

##### ***Yakult***

- Yakult is the original probiotic. It was developed in 1935 by Dr Shirota, at Kyoto University in Japan.
- Dr Shirota was a powerful advocate of preventative medicine. He believed healthy intestines helped give good health and a long life. His philosophy – *Working on a healthy society* – aims to improve physical, mental and social health.
- Yakult has nearly 75 years in bacteriological research and has achieved global recognition in the use of friendly bacteria in foods, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. Research continues at the Yakult Central Institute in Japan and the company also works closely with scientific and medical communities to increase understanding of the role of friendly bacteria in health.
- Today Yakult is consumed by 25 million people in 28 countries world-wide.

##### ***ICM Research***

- ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 1006 adults aged 18 + by telephone between 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information at [www.icmresearch.co.uk](http://www.icmresearch.co.uk)