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THE RURAL–URBAN ENIGMA OF ALLERGY: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD?

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Childhood asthma and related allergic conditions have become the most common chronic disorders in the Western world. Many studies from around the world have demonstrated an increasing trend of asthma prevalence over the last few decades. A few recent reports also suggested that childhood asthma prevalence may be showing a plateau or even a decline in few developed countries. Given the rapid changes in the prevalence over a short period of time, environmental factors are the more likely candidates explaining such trend. One of the most consistent epidemiological findings was that subjects living in the rural areas had lower

prevalence of allergies when compared to those from urban areas. Clear understanding of the mechanisms of how the environmental determinants in the rural environment may affect the early immune system resulting in lower risk of allergies and asthma will facilitate the development of future primary preventive strategies. In this study, we review recent data from around the world and explore the epidemiology and mechanistic studies that may explain the rural–urban difference of allergies

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