Inhaled Corticosteroids Won't Stunt a Child's Growth

New studies confirm that the long-term use of inhaled corticosteroids to treat asthma does not stunt a child's growth and is in fact, an effective and safe treatment, which allows children with asthma to have a better quality of life.

Although inhaled corticosteroids have been used to treat asthma for more than two decades – and are recommended by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's 1997 asthma treatment guidelines as an effective method of treating asthma—parents and physicians have been concerned about long-term side effects. These studies help put those fears to rest and hopefully will help more children receive the treatment they need to control their asthma.

Both studies published in the Oct. 12 *New England Journal of Medicine* – one conducted by the National Institutes of Health and the other by asthma specialists in Denmark – examined the long-term effects of inhaled corticosteroids on children. The NIH study, known as The Childhood Asthma Management Program (CAMP), is the largest and most comprehensive trial ever conducted in the United States for the treatment of childhood asthma. The study involved more than 1,000 children with asthma, aged 5 to 12, for a treatment period of up to six years. The Danish study, conducted by Drs.Lone Agertoft and Soren Pederson, is the longest trial of its kind worldwide. To date, this study has followed 143 children treated daily with inhaled budesonide (Pulmicort) for an average of 9.2 years.

In the Danish study, it was found that children reached their expected final height even after an average of 9.2 years (range 3 to 13 years) of long-term treatment with inhaled budesonide. Likewise the CAMP results showed that budesonide is safe for long-term use in childhood asthma. They found a delay in growth only during the first year of treatment but a return to normal growth rates thereafter resulting in about 1 cm difference in height after the first year. Height was expected to "catch-up" by the time these children reached their final adult heights.

According to the 1997 NIH asthma guidelines, the potential risks of inhaled corticosteroids are well balanced by their benefits. In terms of growth, the guidelines note that poorly controlled asthma may itself delay growth in children. Children on inhaled corticosteroids should be monitored for any potential side effects and the dose reduced to the lowest amount necessary to maintain effective control.