

Amish and other 'insular populations' template for understanding evolution of diseases

Weeks after his birth in 2001, Benjamin Glick was stricken with a mysterious illness.

He would vomit and pass out. He wouldn't eat and lost weight. Over five agonizing months, his parents took him to 12 doctors at six hospitals in the Philadelphia area.

"He was fading out, we were going to lose him," said his father, Amos Glick, who is Old Order Amish and runs a foundry in Chester County.

It took a clinic in a Lancaster County cornfield to save the boy.

Doctors at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia sent the family to the Clinic for Special Children in Strasburg. For years, the site had been refining an unusual specialty: treating Amish and Mennonite children with rare genetic disorders.

Clinic doctors had seen similar symptoms in other children from the insular population they serve. They discovered Benjamin had a debilitating milk-protein allergy and fine-tuned his formula. Benjamin stabilized in a month.

The county's 60,000 Plain People, as they are called, descended from fewer than 100 settlers who came to Lancaster from Europe in the early 1700s. Centuries of intermarriage has increased the risk for developing many conditions.

For instance, Amish babies are 100 times more likely to have this disorder than other infants. At the same time, diseases that strike the general population, such as cystic fibrosis and sickle cell disease, are nonexistent among the Plain People.

Read full, original article: [Small Lancaster County clinic treating Amish, breaking ground on genetics](#)