

National Children's Study Fact Sheet

About The National Children's Study

The National Children's Study is a long-term research project that will examine environmental influences on children's health and development in order to improve the health and well-being of children nationwide. The Study will involve approximately 100,000 children from before birth to age 21, to better understand the link between the environments in which children are raised, and their physical and emotional health and development. For the Study, the "environment" is defined broadly, to include physical surroundings; biological and chemical factors; geography; and social, educational, behavioral, family, and cultural influences. By linking a range of environmental factors to multiple health and developmental outcome measures, the Study will help to pinpoint the root causes of many of today's major childhood diseases and disorders, and determine not only which aspects of the environment are harmful, but also which are harmless or helpful to children's health and development.

Study Issues

The National Children's Study is framed by a set of key scientific research questions that include some of the most pressing health and development concerns for children today. Designed as a longitudinal cohort study, it will examine participants' growth and development over time. The Study will produce information of unprecedented value for scientists, health professionals, and families around multiple concerns, including:

- Obesity, diabetes, and physical development;
- Injuries;
- Asthma;
- Pregnancy-related outcomes; and
- Child development and mental health

Who Will be Involved?

The National Children's Study will recruit more than 100,000 women from 101 Study locations across the United States who are likely to have a child in the near future. These women will represent a cross section of ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic groups. The Study is on schedule to start recruitment nationwide in 2007. By including families from varied backgrounds, the Study can better investigate issues of vital interest to all communities.

Who is Leading the Study?

The National Children's Study will involve partners from federal, state, and local governments; schools and universities; public and non-profit organizations; and private companies. Led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - through the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention - and by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Study will rely on a collection of more than 40 federal agencies and departments, as well as on child and environmental advocacy and support groups, private industries and foundations, community leaders, university-based scientists, and local medical sites across the country to sustain the Study over the next two decades and ensure it remains focused on common goals.

Why is the Study Important?

The National Children's Study will provide essential information about many serious health conditions and threats to favorable physical and mental development. The Study will build a data storehouse touching many areas of concern - and will even be prepared to answer questions that scientists and the public have yet to ask. Unlike other studies that seek answers to a single question, the Study will address multiple related questions and issues, to provide as much information as possible on human health and development. Examples of research questions to be examined include: are prenatal exposures to pesticides linked to increased risk for learning and developmental disabilities; are early childhood viral infections linked to the occurrence of asthma; and do individual, family, and community factors affect childhood injuries.

Why Focus the Research on Children?

Children are not simply "little adults." Their immature systems often make them more vulnerable than adults to environmental exposures. Young children interact with the environment differently, for instance, they spend more time on the ground, close to dust, soil, and other elements of the environment. Scientists understand too little about these factors, and whether they are harmful, harmless, or helpful to children's health and development. Studies conducted with adults often have little application to children because of children's weaker immune systems. Research findings on the effects of lead on child development, or findings on the impact of maternal alcohol use on the fetus emphasize the need for concern about potential environmental exposures on children's developing systems. Issues like these form a key rationale for exploring the effects of other potentially serious environmental influences on children.

What Will We Get from the Study - And When?

The National Children's Study will identify early-life exposures that affect individuals during childhood and throughout the rest of their lives. It will provide researchers, health care providers, educators, and others who work with children with a vast resource of data from which to develop prevention strategies, health and safety guidelines, educational approaches, and possibly new treatments and cures for health conditions. In addition, the Study will prove or disprove many theories of child health and development that are speculative today. For the first time, the Study will allow researchers to apply knowledge of the human genome on a large scale and to understand conditions that arise from gene/environment interactions. Researchers will not need to wait for the completion of the Study to analyze the results. Beginning with birth outcomes, findings will be available within two to three years after the Study is launched, and additional results will be released regularly throughout the

duration of the Study.

How to Contact the Study?

If you have questions regarding the National Children's Study please visit the website at www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov, email at ncs@mail.nih.gov, or call at (301) 594-9147.

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