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UT Southwestern physicians eager to begin National Children's Study

DALLAS – April 27, 2010 – After years of planning, UT Southwestern Medical Center researchers are ready to begin enrolling participants in the National Children's Study, which will examine the effects of environmental and genetic factors on child and adult health.

The National Institutes of Health-led study is the largest of its kind ever conducted in the U.S. The project, already under way in some states, ultimately will follow 100,000 participants from birth to age 21, tracking information on health issues including asthma, birth defects, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. The study's findings may help form the basis of child health guidance, interventions and policy for future generations.

UT Southwestern's efforts are focused on Lamar County, located about 100 miles northeast of Dallas along the border of Texas and Oklahoma. Lamar County is currently the only study site in North Texas, although Dallas County is considered a potential future location. Researchers selected 105 study locations targeted for participation nationwide using a prospective sampling method to ensure that children and families from diverse ethnic, racial, economic, religious, geographic and social groups are represented.

Dr. George Lister, principal investigator and chairman of pediatrics at UT Southwestern, said Lamar County is among the first of 10 counties chosen to use a new recruitment process. Rather than going door-to-door, local coalition members will team with health care providers to recruit and enroll study participants.

"We plan to begin enrolling pregnant women midsummer," said Dr. Lister, who leads the North Texas Children's Study Coalition with Dr. Debra Cherry, lead investigator and occupational medicine physician at the UT Health Science Center at Tyler. "Coalition members are now trying to identify community members and health care providers who can help recruit women who are either pregnant or likely to become pregnant in the near future."

The coalition of Texas institutions also includes researchers from UT Health Science Center at Houston's School of Public Health and from the Battelle Memorial Institute.

Since the undertaking is an observational research study rather than a clinical trial, participants will not be asked to change their day-to-day routines or take any medicines or drugs.

(MORE)

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Staff initially will collect data on pregnancies, such as the participant's diet, chemical exposure and emotional stress. Once the children are born, the researchers will begin collecting biological samples as well as samples of things like air, water and dust from locations where the child spends a lot of time.

Dr. Lister, pediatrician-in-chief at Children's Medical Center Dallas, said that although the study will span more than two decades, results will be made public as the research progresses.

"These results may prompt novel, important questions about children's health and the environment that can be answered later in the study," he said. "We're excited to be taking part in this historic study."

Authorized by Congress in the Children's Health Act of 2000, the National Children's Study is being conducted by a consortium of federal agencies. These include two NIH institutes – the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Other UT Southwestern researchers involved in the study include Dr. Kenneth Leveno, professor of obstetrics and gynecology, and Dr. Rashmin Savani, professor of pediatrics. Dr. Margaret Caughy, associate professor at the UT Health Science Center at Houston's School of Public Health, is also involved with the study.

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