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# NEWS

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\*\*\*\*\*In two separate studies, UT Southwestern researchers screen and treat DISD tenth graders for hypertension.

DALLAS--Although high blood pressure, or hypertension, usually is regarded as an adult problem, increasing efforts now are being made to detect and treat the disease in young people.

In one such effort, researchers at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School have joined forces with Dallas public school officials to screen more than 10,000 teenagers for hypertension as they pass through the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades.

"Sometime during the teenage years there is an increase in the incidence of hypertension," explains Dr. David Fixler, associate professor of pediatrics at the Dallas medical school and head of the project, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health and is now in its third year. "By recording individual blood pressures biannually over a five year period, we hope to determine whether pressures in early adolescence can predict subsequent pressure levels."

Two years ago the research team screened the teenagers when they were 14 years old and in the eighth grade at Dallas Independent School District middle schools. This school year the team will re-screen the same group, which is now in the tenth grade.

The results of the eighth-grade survey showed that less than two percent had persistent hypertension, which is low compared to the 15 percent prevalence in the adult population, Dr. Fixler says. "Hypertension appears to be very uncommon at the eighth-grade level."

Only one child in five who have high blood pressure readings the first time they are tested will continue to have elevated pressures, Dr. Fixler adds. "Often the child is nervous or excited and it affects the blood pressure reading." For that reason, the research team does two follow-up examinations of those children with the highest initial blood pressure measurements. Only 160 of the 10,000 eighth graders had blood pressure readings that remained in the upper fifth percentile on all three examinations.

When the researchers had identified a group of hypertensive adolescents, this raised the question of what treatment they should receive.

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first add screening study

"So far there have been very few scientific studies done to determine the best form of treatment for young persons with high blood pressure," explains Dr. W.P. Laird, assistant professor of pediatrics at UT Southwestern and another key participant in the screening project. "Most of these kids' blood pressure levels are only mildly elevated compared to hypertensive adults, so we certainly do not feel they should be treated with medication."

In a separate study begun this fall, Dr. Laird is looking at the effects of exercise training in the already-diagnosed hypertensive adolescents. Funded by the American Heart Association, the six-month study aims to determine whether or not a regular program of vigorous exercise will lower the teenagers' blood pressures back into the normal range.

Several studies in middle-aged hypertensive men have suggested that such a program may result in a lowered resting blood pressure, Dr. Laird says. "We theorize that the exercise program will have a similar effect in adolescents."

Thus, about 15 of the tenth graders who were found to be hypertensive in the eighth-grade survey will begin jogging this month during their gym periods. All of the participants in the exercise study previously have undergone thorough medical examinations, including exercise stress testing.

Both Dr. Fixler and Dr. Laird are affiliated with Children's Medical Center in Dallas, where Dr. Fixler is chief of cardiology and Dr. Laird is director of the pediatric echocardiographic laboratory.

Both say that cooperation between the school district and the research team has been excellent. "It's a good example of the medical school and the school district cooperating for the betterment of the children's health," Dr. Fixler says.

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