

Scientists study early childhood diarrhea

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U.S. and Brazilian scientists say a gene linked with Alzheimer's disease may protect children from development problems of early childhood diarrhea.

Researchers at the University of Virginia School of Medicine and the Federal University of Ceara in Brazil say children in Northeast Brazil who suffer from early childhood diarrhea and malnutrition also suffer from lasting physical and cognitive consequences.

"However, some children ... are protected from the developmental problems if they have the 'Alzheimer's gene' (APOE4)," said Dr. Richard Guerrant, director of the Center for Global Health at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. "Basically, we believe this gene protects the children early in life by helping them survive severe malnutrition, but the same gene potentially contributes to a multitude of problems later in life."

"This might have important implications for Brazil and other developing countries, where diabetes and cardiovascular disease are also becoming critical issues in public health," noted Dr. Reinaldo Oria, who is working as one of the principal investigators in Brazil.

Oria said the primary goal of the study will be to develop interventional therapies based on critical nutrients which children need for their cognitive and physical development.

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