

## Southampton scientists begin Phase II patient trial for new asthma treatment

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Scientists from the University of Southampton and Synairgen Research Ltd, a respiratory drug development company spun out from the University, have begun a Phase II study into the effectiveness of the drug interferon beta for asthma patients.

An increase in the frequency of asthma attacks (also known as 'exacerbations') is commonly triggered by cold or flu viruses because the lungs of patients with the condition are unable to mount the strong [immune response](#) that normally protects healthy airways.

When the infection spreads from the nose to the lungs it also causes inflammation which leads to such exacerbations.

A successful treatment to prevent virus-triggered asthma exacerbations would reduce the number of [asthma patients](#) suffering increased frequency of attacks and subsequently potentially life-threatening deterioration of [lung function](#), thereby greatly reducing emergency admissions to hospital.

Professor Ratko Djukanovic, a clinical respiratory specialist at the University's School of Medicine and Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust and Director of the Southampton Respiratory Biomedical Research Unit, explains: "When common cold or flu viruses spread from the nose and throat to the chest of asthma patients, they can cause a rapid deterioration in their health. Our scientists in Southampton, led by the team of Professor Donna Davies, have found in laboratory-based tests

that the lungs are able to protect themselves when the protein interferon beta is introduced.

"If the drug works as we hope it will, it could significantly improve the quality of life for these patients and lessen the number of patients admitted to hospital. However, it is important to stress that there are a number of stages before the drug could be made available to the public.

"We are particularly pleased to have been joined in this clinical trial by other lead asthma centres in the UK which have similar biomedical research units funded by the National Institute for Health Research."

Over the next 9 - 15 months, asthma patients taking part in the study who visit the Biomedical Research Unit at Southampton General Hospital will be given either interferon beta or a placebo by inhalation, when they develop cold or flu symptoms.

The results will be used to determine if inhaled [interferon beta](#) is a viable treatment for virus-triggered asthma symptoms.

Scientists have already established that the drug was well tolerated in an earlier Phase I trial in [asthma](#) patients and that anti-viral defences were activated.

Richard Marsden, CEO of Synairgen, comments: "We are delighted to be starting this pivotal study. If these tests are successful it could lead to a new treatment being on the market in four years or so. This is very important research and showcases the best of British clinical science and interaction between industry and academic researchers."

Once the study has begun in Southampton, it will be extended to other clinical trial sites around the UK.

Provided by University of Southampton

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