

UT Southwestern pediatricians launch landmark children's health study

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Recruitment for the largest long-term study of children's health ever undertaken in the U.S. is now under way in Lamar County, about 100 miles northeast of UT Southwestern Medical Center, along the Texas-Oklahoma border.

The multicenter study will eventually follow 100,000 children nationwide from birth until age 21 to determine how various factors, including environmental and genetic ones, affect a child's health, development and quality of life. The findings may help form the basis of child health guidance, interventions and policy for future generations.

Dr. George Lister, chairman of pediatrics and principal investigator for the North Texas Children's Study Coalition, a collaboration of three UT System campuses and Battelle Memorial Research Institute in Columbus, Ohio, said at a February press conference that the significance of the study can't be overstated.

"This is a landmark study that's initiated across the country and will be something that will resonate not just in the United States but around the world," said Dr. Lister, who is collaborating on the study with Dr. Debra Cherry, principal investigator for the Lamar County location and occupational medicine physician at the UT Health Science Center at Tyler. "Lamar County will help us piece together some of the factors that influence the health of infants and children and, ultimately, some of the factors that influence chronic illness, and how we might either mitigate or manage those illnesses."

Lamar County, one of the few rural counties currently involved in the National Children's Study, is the only active study site in North Texas, although Dallas County is considered a potential future location. Bexar County, with San Antonio the county seat, is the only other active study site in Texas.

Researchers selected 105 study locations across the U.S. using a random sampling method to ensure that children and families from diverse ethnic, racial, economic, religious, geographic and social groups are represented.

Rather than have study staff go door-to-door to recruit families, the Lamar County research team is collaborating with obstetricians and pediatricians in Paris and Sulphur Springs to identify and refer women who are pregnant, or may become pregnant in the next few years, for possible participation. Dr. Lister, who is also pediatrician-in-chief at Children's Medical Center Dallas, said the team hopes to enroll and follow 1,000 Lamar County children.

The undertaking is an observational research study rather than a clinical trial, so participants will not be asked to change their day-to-day routines or take any medicines or drugs. Staff initially will collect data on pregnancies, such as the participant's diet, chemical exposure and emotional stress. Once children are born, the researchers will begin collecting biological samples as well as samples of things such as air, water and dust from locations where the [children](#) spend a lot of time.

Dr. Cherry said study site staffers already have identified a few potential participants. Though the entire study will take more than two decades to complete, results will be made public as the research progresses.

"As soon as we have findings we feel we can publish, we'll reveal them right away," she said.

Dr. Lister added: "These results may prompt novel, important questions about children's [health](#) and the environment that can be answered later in the study."

Provided by UT Southwestern Medical Center

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