

# Study of youth to seek origins of heart disease among African-Americans

November 3 2011

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Researchers supported by the National Institutes of Health are undertaking a preliminary study to identify the early origins of heart disease among African-Americans. The new feasibility study will enroll children and grand children of participants taking part in the largest study of heart disease risk factors among African-American adults, the Jackson Heart Study (JHS), in Jackson, Miss.

Called the Jackson Heart Kids Study, or JHS Kids, the new effort is a pilot study, to inform the design of a full scale study to be conducted at a later date. Obesity is thought to result from a complex interaction of environmental and hereditary factors. Moreover, previous studies have indicated that becoming overweight is often a gradual process, beginning in late childhood or early adolescence.

Funding for the study has been provided by the NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The NICHD provides support for the JHS Kids study through a collaborative agreement with the Institute for the Improvement of Minority Health and [Health Disparities](#) in the [Delta Region](#) (the Delta Regional Institute), a program which is supported by the Office of Minority Health.

Bettina Beech, Dr.P.H., of the Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, N.C., will be the lead investigator for the study and will collaborate with researchers Warren Jones, M.D., Marino Bruce, Ph.D., and Mario Sims, Ph.D., at the University of Mississippi

Medical Center, Jackson.

The researchers will collect blood and other biological samples from the participants, along with detailed information on their diet, exercise patterns, and other aspects of their lifestyle. They hope to compare information from the adolescent participants to information about their older relatives taking part in the JHS, to help determine how environment and hereditary factors combine to increase the risk for obesity and later [heart disease](#).

"The idea behind JHS Kids is to identify key early life risk factors for obesity and heart disease," said Regina James, M.D., director of the Division of Special Populations at the NICHD. "After these [risk factors](#) are identified, we'll be in a better position to develop early intervention and prevention strategies to address obesity and heart disease."

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among Americans. Smoking, lack of exercise, obesity and high blood pressure or cholesterol levels all increase a person's risk for heart disease. The Office of Minority Health notes that African-American adults are more likely to be diagnosed with heart disease than are other Americans, and also more likely than other Americans to die from it.

Dr. Beech and her colleagues will enroll 200 12- to 19-year-old children or grandchildren of JHS participants. Study researchers will visit participants' homes in the Jackson area to record their height and weight, measure their blood sugar and blood pressure, gauge their activity levels, and obtain information about their diet and other aspects of their lifestyle. The researchers will make two such visits, with the second taking place six months after the first. After analyzing the data they collect, the researchers will review what they've learned and design a larger study to track the development of obesity and heart disease in the children and grandchildren of the JHS participants.

JHS, lead by Herman Taylor, M.D., at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, began in 2000 and is supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the NIH.

"Childhood obesity rates are rising rapidly, and this is a trend of particular concern in the African-American community," said Dr. James. "Improved understanding of [heart disease risk](#) factors among youth may lead to better ways to prevent heart disease risk among adults."

Provided by NIH

Citation: Study of youth to seek origins of heart disease among African-Americans (2011, November 3) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-11-youth-heart-disease-african-americans.html>

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