

US scientists head to Mount Everest for research

April 20 2012, By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA , Associated Press



FILE - In this May 19, 2010 file photo, clouds hover above the world's highest peak Mount Everest, as seen from Syangboche, about 125 kilometers (80 miles) northeast of Katmandu, Nepal. A team of American scientists and researchers is setting up a laboratory at Mount Everest to study the effects of high altitude on humans. Team leader Dr. Bruce Johnson and eight other team members flew to the airstrip at Lukla, near Everest, on Friday, April 20, 2012. (AP Photo/ Binod Joshi)

(AP) -- A team of American scientists and researchers flew to the Mount Everest region on Friday to set up a laboratory at the base of the world's highest mountain to study the effects of high altitude on humans.

The team from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota says it plans to monitor nine climbers attempting to scale Everest to learn more about the physiology of humans at high altitudes in order to help patients with [heart conditions](#) and other ailments.

"We are interested in some of the parallels between high altitude physiology and [heart failure](#) physiology," Dr. Bruce Johnson, who is heading the team, told The Associated Press before leaving Nepal's capital, Katmandu, for the mountain. "What we are doing here will help us with our work that we have been doing in the (Mayo Clinic) laboratory."

Johnson and the eight other team members flew to the airstrip at Lukla, near Everest, on Friday.

It will take them about a week to trek to the Everest base camp, with several porters and yaks helping to carry their 680 kilograms (1,500 pounds) of medical equipment. They will set up their lab at the base camp, which is located at 5,300 meters (17,380 feet), and expect to be at the camp until at least mid-May.

The team says Everest's extreme altitude puts climbers under the same conditions experienced by patients suffering from heart disease.

The team members plan to study the effects of high altitude on the heart, the lungs, [muscle loss](#) and sleep during their stay at Everest, which peaks at 8,850 meters (29,035 feet).

Johnson said that the team's laboratory at the Mayo Clinic focuses on lung congestion during [heart](#) failure and that lung congestion often kills mountain climbers.

Hundreds of climbers and their guides attempt to climb Everest every

year, while thousands more trek up to the base camp. Several of them suffer from high altitude sickness and other complications because of the low level of oxygen.

An experienced Sherpa guide who had scaled Everest at least 10 times died of [high altitude](#) sickness Wednesday at the mountain's base camp, becoming the first fatality in this year's spring climbing season.

Hundreds of climbers and their guides are currently camped at the base camp preparing to scale Everest. Climbers generally try to scale the mountain in May, when weather conditions usually improve just enough to enable them to attempt to reach the peak.

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