

Trial asthma drug targets lung inflammation

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University of Adelaide researchers at the Royal Adelaide Hospital are involved in the world's biggest study of its kind investigating a possible new treatment for asthma.

Clinical trials are underway looking at an antibiotic treatment which is hoped to reduce inflammation of the lungs in people with [persistent asthma](#). Researchers are now recruiting [asthma](#) sufferers for the study.

Speaking in the lead up to World Asthma Day (7 May), [respiratory health](#) expert Associate Professor Sandra Hodge (University of Adelaide School of Medicine and Royal Adelaide Hospital) says the trial treatment is aimed at helping asthma sufferers who don't respond well to normal therapies.

"Asthma remains a significant health problem in Australia, with more than 2.2 million Australians suffering from it. Prevalence rates in Australia are high by international comparison, and effective treatment is critical," Associate Professor Hodge says.

"Current [asthma medication](#) is often targeted to treating a particular type of white blood cell, called an eosinophil. However, almost half of the people with [asthma symptoms](#) have normal levels of these eosinophils and don't respond as well to current asthma therapies.

"For these people, a different type of white blood cell, the neutrophil, may be more important, and this is why we're currently involved in searching for alternative treatment," Associate Professor Hodge says.

Associate Professor Hodge and University of Adelaide Professor Paul Reynolds, Respiratory Physician at the RAH and Director of the Lung Research Laboratory, Hanson Institute, have joined with other leading asthma researchers from around Australia in the biggest study of its type in the world.

The \$2.9 million five-year study, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), is investigating the potential benefits of a macrolide antibiotic in the lungs of asthmatics who still have symptoms despite taking their preventer medications.

"[Macrolide antibiotics](#) are broad-spectrum antibiotics derived from natural products. They're approved to treat infections but they also have proven anti-inflammatory activities in a growing number of lung diseases, even when infection is not present," Professor Reynolds says.

Associate Professor Hodge says: "While we suspect there are potential benefits to be had from using low doses of the antibiotic to reduce inflammation in the lungs, this study will help to determine just how effective the treatment is and ensure it is safe to use. Along the way, it will help us to address a number of important cell biology questions that are critical to our understanding of how asthma works."

Provided by University of Adelaide

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