

FRIENDS OF NICHD COALITION NEWS

The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
National Institutes of Health

Winter 2008

The *Friends of NICHD News* is a quarterly report from the Friends of NICHD highlighting some of the research advances and programs funded by the NICHD, one of the institutes at the National Institutes of Health. The Friends of NICHD is an independent coalition of more than 100 organizations representing scientists, physicians, health care providers, patients and parents concerned with the health and welfare of women, children, families and people with disabilities. The NICHD sponsors research on human development, before and after birth; maternal, child, and family health; reproductive biology and population issues; and medical rehabilitation. For more information, visit the Institute's Web site at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov>.

NICHD Opens its Doors to Congressional Staff

In November 2007, the Friends of NICHD, in partnership with the Congressional Biomedical Caucus, hosted a delegation of congressional staff on a tour of the institute's intramural labs and clinical research facilities. The event provided House and Senate staff an opportunity to meet personally with NICHD Director Dr. Duane Alexander and learn about the broad mission of the Institute and how it supports thousands of scientists pursuing both basic and clinical research on issues such as: autism, learning disabilities, reproductive health, child development, genetic disorders, medical rehabilitation and maternal and child HIV/AIDS.

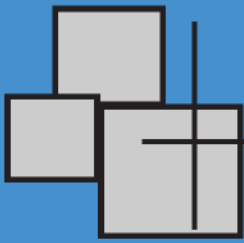
NICHD Releases New Down Syndrome Research Plan

The National Institutes of Health has developed a research plan to advance understanding of Down syndrome and speed development of new treatments for the condition, the most frequent genetic cause of mild to moderate intellectual disability and associated medical problems. The plan cites the need for increased research on the medical, cognitive, and behavioral conditions that occur in people with Down syndrome. These conditions include leukemia, heart disease, sleep apnea, seizure disorders, stomach disorders and mental health problems. The plan sets research goals for the next 10 years that build upon earlier research advances fostered by the NIH. The Research plan can be found at:

http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/upload/NIH_Downsyndrome_plan.pdf

Researchers Discover Thinner Bones for Boys with Autism

By examining X-Rays of the hands of boys with autism, researchers from the NICHD and the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center found that while the bones of the boys with autism were growing longer, they were not thickening at a normal rate. At 5 or 6 years of age, the bones of the autistic boys were significantly thinner than the bones of boys without autism and the difference in bone thickness became even greater at ages 7 and 8. The bone thinning was particularly notable because the boys with autism and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were heavier than average and would therefore be expected to have thicker bones. The researchers believe that boys with autism and ASD are at risk for poor bone development for a number of reasons. These factors are lack of exercise, a reluctance to eat a varied diet, lack of vitamin D, digestive problems, and diets that exclude casein, a protein found in milk and milk products. Dairy products provide a significant source of calcium and vitamin D. Casein-free diets are a controversial treatment thought by some to lessen the symptoms of autism. General information about autism and ASD is available from the NICHD's Web site at: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/autism/overview/index.cfm>.



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NICHD Funds African American Community Efforts on Childhood Obesity

Officials from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently announced a collaboration with the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) to help African American children maintain a healthy weight. As part of this collaboration, NCNW members around the U.S. will offer a fun, fast-paced training program for parents, and one for children, developed by the NIH. The programs are based on NIH's successful *We Can!* or "Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition," a science-based national education program to help children ages 8-13 stay at a healthy weight. Four NIH institutes, including NICHD, are partnering in this effort.

More information is available at:

http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/collaboration_ncnw_120607.cfm

Experimental Vaccine Reduces Stillbirths from Common Virus

Researchers funded by the NICHD have developed an experimental vaccine that reduces stillbirths among pregnant guinea pigs already infected with cytomegalovirus (CMV), a very common asymptomatic virus that can cause mental retardation and hearing loss in newborns. The number of children born in the U.S. each year is estimated at about 40,000 and there is currently no vaccine or treatment for pregnant women who have the infection. Development of such a vaccine has been named by the Institute of Medicine as a top priority in the area of maternal and child health.

Researchers at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine led a research team that developed the prototype vaccine. Female guinea pigs given the CMV vaccine before becoming pregnant gave birth to fewer dead pups and were much less likely to transmit the infection to their offspring than those which had not received the vaccine. After further testing, the next step will be to develop a version of the vaccine that could be tested in humans. For more information visit [http:// www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/news.cfm](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/news.cfm).

New Spanish Publication Provides Evidence-Based Parenting Guidelines

Carrying out its mission to support healthy families, the NICHD recently released, *Que Significa Ser Padres?* ("What does it mean to be parents?"), a free Spanish Language publication geared toward Spanish-speaking parents, grandparents and other caregivers, offering parenting strategies based on scientific research that can be used for children of any age. It gives practical suggestions for successful parenting practices that can be adapted for parents' own lives and situations, including real life examples of how some parents have incorporated these strategies into their daily lives.

For free copies of "*Que Significa ser Padres?*" by calling NICHD at: 1-800-370-2943 or visit: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/significapadres>.

Celebrating 45 years of research on all stages of human development to better understand and improve the health of children, adults, families and communities.

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<http://www.apa.org/ppo/friendsofnichd.html>