

Caring Parents Needed to Help Researchers Fight Flu

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Researchers at the University of Birmingham are looking for parents of children with intellectual disabilities, from across the West Midlands, to take part in a new research project.

The team from the University's School of Sport and Exercise Sciences are hoping to determine what effect providing round-the-clock care has on parents' immune response to both the flu and pneumonia vaccines. This data will help assess, whether providing care could have a negative impact on parents' health and whether they are a vulnerable group, who could benefit from yearly flu jabs.

Any parents, who provide care for an intellectually disabled child aged between 3 and 18 can apply to take part in the six month project.

Dr Anna Phillips from the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences explains: "Our earlier work has shown that that stressful events like bereavement have a negative impact on people's immune response to vaccination. But there has been very little work looking at those who provide long term care for children.

We know that many of these parents provide extraordinary care for their children and experience high levels of stress as a result This study will show, whether this has any negative impact on their immune system, which could impact on their overall health.

She continues: "At the moment parents who care for children with a major physical or mental problem don't receive yearly flu jab, so we hope this study may provide evidence about whether they should be thought of as a vulnerable group."

The participants will need to visit the School of Sports and Exercise Sciences for an initial check up from a nurse and to receive their vaccinations. There are then two follow up sessions, one month and six months after the initial consultation, where the researchers take blood samples to look at the levels of antibodies in the blood.

Study leader Stephen Gallagher explains: "We would really like parents who spend time looking after a child with any severe intellectual disability to be part of the study. This could include parents of children with autism, Prader-Willi, Cornelia de Lange and Downs syndromes. The main thing for our research is that parents must need to provide regular care and supervision for their child. We are also encouraging our parents to bring along a friend to the sessions, both to provide support and also to act as a control group."

Those potentially interested in participating should contact Stephen Gallagher from the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences on 0121 414 8747 or by e-mail: sxg598@bham.ac.uk

Media

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Notes to Editors:

Flu facts:

- In most years it is estimated at least 3,000-4,000 deaths are attributable to the complications of flu & around 10-15% of the population develop flu each year.
- At least another 20,000, and in cold winters 40,000, people die as a result of cold weather.
- The worst global epidemic (pandemic) ever was the 'Spanish Flu', which affected large parts of the world population and is thought to have killed at least 40 million people in 1918-1919.
- Flu is highly infectious: 100,000 flu particles can be projected into the air with just one sneeze.
- In just 12 hours, the flu virus can invade 1 million of your nose and throat cells.
- It only takes a minute to get the flu jab, but this will protect you for 12 months.
- The flu is particularly dangerous to people with asthma, diabetes, chronic heart, chest or kidney complaints, lowered immunity and to those aged 65 or over.
- The flu jab is free for people who are at risk (with one of the above conditions) and for those aged 65 and over.
- A sneeze, which can carry the virus, travels at 80 miles per hour and can reach distances of up to 30 feet away.
- The flu jab contains no live virus, so it cannot give you the flu.
- The World Health Organisation maps flu viruses and the vaccine is altered each year to ensure that it gives the best protection against the latest strains.

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School of Sport and Exercise Sciences:

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The school's research activities focus on Behavioural Medicine, Cardiovascular and Respiratory Physiology in Exercise, Exercise Biochemistry, Human Movement and Sport Psychology.

For further information on school activities, visit: <http://www.sportex.bham.ac.uk/> (<http://www.sportex.bham.ac.uk/>)