

Major child-health study planned

by Cheryl Clark - CNS

SAN DIEGO, Calif. - Researchers soon will begin recruiting 100,000 parents-to-be, including 1,000 in the San Diego region, to join a study looking at how genes and environment influence children's health into adulthood.

The National Children's Study, which Congress mandated in 2000, will begin tracking the children before birth through age 21. The \$69 million project is the largest examination of child developmental health attempted in the United States.

The goal is to learn what factors - genes, birth weight, dust, diet, chemicals, lifestyle and other behaviors or circumstances - are behind the increase in diabetes, obesity, attention-deficit disorder, autism and other conditions.

"We're creating a national repository ... that will allow us to go back years from now and answer questions about health that we haven't even thought of yet," said Christina Chambers, principal investigator for the University of California San Diego portion of the study. UCSD, in partnership with San Diego State University, is one of 105 centers that will recruit and follow the 100,000 children. Other partners include the county Department of Health and Human Services.

One goal of the San Diego portion of the study, Chambers said, is to examine a theory that pregnant women with diabetes are more likely to give birth to children with birth defects.

UCSD will receive \$14 million of the \$69 million for the first five years of the project. Parents and children - when they turn age 7 - will be paid for participating, Chambers said. The estimated compensation will be about \$50 per visit.

Recruiting will be done through door-to-door random surveys.

Recruiting will start in Orange County next year and in San Diego County in 2009. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is funding and running the study.

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