

2006

Tasmanian Health Study Newsletter

Welcome to the third edition of TAS News.

This newsletter is to update you on the current medical research for the TAS health study—particularly your involvement in the follow-up for the Asthma Rich Families Study

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New Research Member:
Dr Melanie Matheson joins
the TAS Team to investigate
genetic risk factors for
asthma and other chronic
respiratory diseases.



Asthma Rich Families Study

You have been sent this letter as your family was part of the Asthma Rich Families Study which started back in 1996 and is a sub-study of the Tasmanian Health Study (described on back). We are asking participants who were part of the ARF Study to complete another survey as part of a new follow-up study.

The aim of the ARF study is to understand why asthma seems to be more common in some families.

Your family was one of the families selected from the 1968 TAS study to be part of the ARF study. We are asking you and members of your family to be part of the ARF study again.

Originally the ARF study was composed of 33 special families with more than one asthmatic family member. In 1996 we surveyed the main participants (who were born in 1961), their parents, siblings, spouses, children, nieces and nephews, making a total of 351 ARF participants. These participants completed a questionnaire, a skin prick test for allergy and had a blood sample taken for genetic analysis.

We are now following-up these very special families to see how things may have changed over the years. We will also be recruiting more families to the study in the future.

If you would need help in completing your follow-up survey or have questions about this medical research study please feel free to contact us on:

Ph: 1800 110 711

(free call from a landline phone).

Background of TAS

This medical research started back in 1968 when all the 8,583 children who were born in 1961 were surveyed through the schools in Tasmania. At this time your height and weight were measured and some information about your health was collected using a survey and a breathing test. Your brothers, sisters and parents were also surveyed. Including these family members there were 45,900 participants, which makes this research the biggest of its kind in the world!

Many people may not remember this study as it was so long ago. However, since then there have been two follow-up studies on some of these participants.

In 1974, 7,130 participants who were then 13 years old completed a questionnaire. Of these children 850 also did breathing tests in a laboratory.

Another follow-up study was done in 1992 when the study participants were aged 31 years. This time 1,500 answered a questionnaire about their health. A brief description of the findings of these studies are on the back of this newsletter. With the original 1968 study and these two follow-up studies we have information about the health of 2,100 people through different stages of their lives!

It is now 38 years since this original study and these people are now 44 or 45 years old.

In 2004, the TAS researchers were awarded a National Health and Medical Research Council Grant and a Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust grant to conduct the current follow-up study. Funding was also received by The University of Melbourne, The Victorian Asthma Foundation, The Helen McPherson Smith Trust, the Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation and the QLD Asthma Foundation.

The current follow-up study which started in 2004 has involved tracing as many of the original participants as possible and then resurveying with a postal or phone survey. The current study also involves a laboratory study for those who were part of either the 1974 or 1992 follow-up studies.

Finding from previous TAS studies

The original 1968 TAS study showed that 16% of our children had suffered from asthma or wheezy breathing. At the time of the 1992 follow-up study when participants were aged 32 years, 75% of those who had asthma as a 7 year old no longer had it, but one in 10 had developed asthma as an adult. Factors that seem to predict asthma as an adult include having a history of eczema, low lung volumes, a parent with a history of asthma, asthma during childhood and being female!

The 36-year TAS follow-up survey continues

In 2002, the TAS research team began locating the people involved with this research so a follow-up postal survey could be carried out. 7,500 of the 8,500 people were traced using the Federal Electoral Rolls, Tasmanian Marriage Registry, the National Death Index, the Australian Twin Registry, a mail out to family members, Tasmanian hospitals, the Tasmanian department of Transport, White Pages and many, many phone calls!

The survey was posted in November of 2003. Three extra mail outs and phone surveys were also done to improve the response rate. This process is still continuing and currently the response rate is 76%!

The TAS laboratory study continues

The laboratory stage of the TAS has been underway for nearly 18 months and has tested over 600 people so far. We plan to test 1,200 people before the end of 2006.

We have recently established a collaboration with Dr Stephen Morrison and Dr Iain Feather in Queensland. This will enable Queensland participants of the TAS study to participate in the Laboratory phase of the study. Two testing centres have been established, one in Brisbane and one on the Gold Coast. These two new sites are to be in addition to the existing testing centres in Tasmania (the Royal Hobart Hospital, and clinics in Launceston and Burnie) and at The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne.

The laboratory visit is aimed at collecting more detailed information on lung health to improve our understanding of lung health problems in middle age.



Above a research participant does a lung function test at the Alfred Hospitals' testing laboratory