# TAHS NEWS

2007 ISSUE I

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## History of TAHS

The Tasmanian Longitudinal Health Study (TAHS) (formerly called Tasmanian Asthma Study), is one of the world's largest and longest studies on respiratory health. You and your family were part of the TAHS when it started in 1968. It has now been running for nearly 40 years.

In 1968, all Tasmanian school children born in 1961 were enrolled in a medical research study to look at factors related to asthma. At the time this research study was called the Tasmanian Asthma Study (TAS). The study has since been renamed the Tasmanian Longitudinal Health Study because it has been going for so long and because the research now covers more than just asthma.

The children were 7 years of age and the research surveys were filled in by their parents. The parents also completed surveys

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## Brothers & Sisters Follow-up Study

We are now following-up all the brothers and sisters who were part of the original 1968 survey. This study will allow us to identify things that may have been different between them that has caused one to develop asthma or other lung diseases while the other has not gone on to develop these diseases.

Studying family members is a very special way to look at these diseases and has not been done before anywhere in the world.

You have been selected to be part of this study because you and your brothers and sisters were part of the original TAHS in 1968. Even if you do not have any lung diseases we would still like you to take part in the study.

**Research on Siblings is an important way to understand risk factors for disease.**

The brothers and sisters follow-up study has two stages:

Stage I - A postal survey which is enclosed with this newsletter.

Stage II – Some brothers and sisters will be invited to attend a laboratory for breathing tests.

Your participation in this follow-up is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Completing the postal survey does not mean you have to take part in stage II. We need as many people as possible to complete the postal survey and we hope you will take part.

# History of TAHS continued ....

themselves and on other children in the family. All up, over 45,000 people were part of the study. This makes it one of the largest studies of lung diseases in the world.

Since the original TAHS in 1968 there have been several follow-up studies of these school children in 1974, 1979 and 1992.

The most recent TAHS follow-up was started in 2002 when our research team tried to locate all children from the 1968 survey. These people are now in their early 40's.

We were able to locate people using many different methods including the Federal Electoral Rolls, Tasmanian Marriage Registry, the National Death Index and many, many phone calls! We located more than 80% of the original participants, which is over 6,500 people.

In November 2003 we posted the 36-year follow-up survey to participants. After much chasing and many phone calls we now have completed surveys from 5,727 people (more than 74% of the original group). We are very grateful to everyone who helped with this research. Below is a brief summary of the survey results so far.

To update your details, please call us on

**1800-110-711**

(Free call in Australia)

or email on

**inq-tas@unimelb.edu.au**

## Postal Survey Results

### Asthma

The figure to the right shows the change in asthma from the age of 7 years, to the age of 44 years. At age 7 nearly 20% of children had asthma, 22% of these people still had asthma at 44 years of age. In contrast asthma was present in about 10% of those 44 year olds who didn't have any signs of asthma at age 7. These results show that asthma changes over time. The cause of asthma in children may be different to the causes of asthma in adults. It is important that we look for what these causes might be so people can be aware of them and prevent asthma.

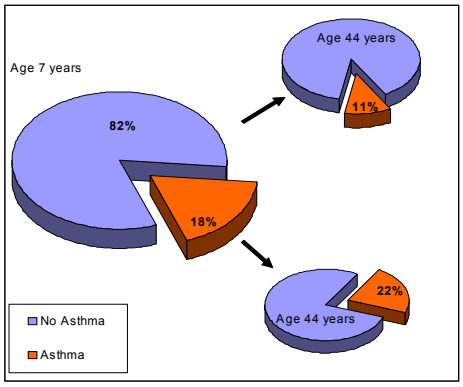


**Diagram showing the change in asthma from age of 7 to the age of 44 years**

### Obesity & Asthma

Obesity is becoming a major problem and we have looked at obesity and the risk of developing asthma. We have used a measure of obesity and body fat called Body Mass Index (BMI). Our results showed for every 1% increase in BMI there was a 9% increase in the risk of asthma in females. For males there was a 12% increase in the risk of asthma. These results highlight the need to control unhealthy eating in childhood. Children should also be encouraged to exercise regularly to help protect against asthma.

### Breast feeding & Asthma

The effect of breast feeding on asthma and allergies is controversial. We studied the effect of breast feeding on asthma at the ages of 7, 14, 21, 32 and 44 years. We found that babies who had only been breast fed were less likely to have asthma at the age of 7. However they actually had an increased risk of asthma later in life. The risk was strongest in children who had a mother with asthma or hayfever. Breast feeding is still very important in protecting babies against other common infections and diseases, but it may not help protect against asthma and allergies.

### Allergies in Childhood

People with allergies to cats, pollen and dust mites often also have asthma. We have studied the effect of allergies on risk of asthma. We found that allergies in childhood, such as hayfever, baby eczema and food allergies were all important risk factors for the development of asthma. Hayfever was the strongest risk factor for asthma. A lot of people get hayfever over their lifetime. Protecting against hayfever may be an important way to stop asthma developing.

If you would like some more information about the results please call us on TAHS 1800-110-711