

GROWING UP HEALTHY

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STUDY



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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HEALTH GROWTH ENVIRONMENT

GROWING UP HEALTHY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STUDY

Growing Up Healthy: An Overview of the National Children's Study is intended for health professionals and researchers, community leaders, child and environmental health advocates, policy makers, Study leadership, and anyone else who is interested in learning more about the National Children's Study.

This document is a description of the National Children's Study, the largest long-term study of children's health and development ever to be conducted in the United States. This overview provides the framework for the National Children's Study, scheduled to begin in 2006. It outlines the key research questions and introduces the approaches Study leaders will take for involving 100,000 families in the Study over a 21-year period.

Between now and its actual start, National Children's Study planners will complete the process under way to develop the specific details of many aspects of the Study, including design features, research questions, how participants will be selected, and what participation will include. Although the design of the Study is still in development, it is important to share news of this research program—even before all of its components are fully determined—due to the Study's potential and early levels of interest that have been expressed.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Growing up healthy is every child's right and every parent's dream for their children. As a nation, we have made significant advances in improving child health and development over the past century by identifying the causes of many diseases; by developing preventive measures, treatments, and cures; and by improving the overall health status of our children. Still, children today suffer high rates of asthma, developmental disorders, obesity, preventable injuries, and other problems that continue to confound science and society as a whole.

What is behind the occurrence of these seemingly preventable diseases? What is it about the way we live today that keeps so many children from enjoying healthy lives? A large number of health studies have brought us closer to identifying root causes of diseases, but none to date has undertaken such a comprehensive look at the early lifespan—from prenatal months through young adulthood—with such high hopes for providing answers as the National Children's Study.

The National Children's Study reaffirms the federal government's commitment to the health and well being of children by drawing together the nation's top experts on child health and the environment in an unprecedented collaboration. Multiple federal agencies, national non-profit groups, community health care providers, and more than 100,000 families stand poised to help child health move forward in the 21st century. The goals of the Study complement government efforts to challenge individuals, communities, and professionals to take action to ensure that good health and long life are enjoyed by all. The Study also supports national goals to enhance education, for instance, by exploring the role of children's environments on their readiness to learn.

Undertaking a study of this magnitude will be neither effortless, nor automatic. To be successful over many years, and for tens of thousands of families to participate, the National Children's Study will require a significant mobilization of people, funding, and leadership at all levels. It requires careful attention to privacy, confidentiality, timing for reporting Study findings, and ethical considerations that arise in research involving children. This effort cannot go forward without the enthusiasm of scientists throughout the country, nor can it meet its objectives without the support of local community institutions and organizations.

Participating in the National Children's Study has been compared to planting a tree—the gift the participant provides today may not necessarily benefit the individual, but its value will grow over time, improving many children's lives for years to come. Embarking on a long journey is filled with anticipation and ripe with hope and opportunity for what will be discovered along the way. With the support of the country, the National Children's Study will have the opportunity to give our children the healthy and happy lives they deserve.





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