

# HHS NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
Laurie K. Doepel  
(301) 496-5717

Robert E. Windom, M.D., assistant secretary for health, today announced that the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has awarded a five-year, \$6.7 million contract to the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus in San Juan to determine which factors influence transmission of the AIDS virus during pregnancy and birth.

A congressional report released late last year concluded that AIDS is rapidly emerging as a major health threat to infants. The projected rise in the number of babies infected with the AIDS virus, especially among minority and other women who are drug abusers or sexual partners of drug abusers, prompted NIAID's decision to fund a major collaborative study to examine this problem.

This award brings to four the number of such contracts funded in a joint program by NIAID and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Three other contracts were awarded in June to institutions in Boston, Chicago and New York. The addition of the University of Puerto Rico to those institutions previously funded strengthens NIAID's and NICHD's commitment to design improved prevention, diagnostic, education, and treatment programs for all women at risk of HIV infection and their children.

(more)

As of October 24, 1,212 children in the United States under age 13 have been diagnosed with AIDS; many more are believed to be infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the cause of AIDS. Approximately 80 percent of these children acquired the virus from their mothers.

The exact mechanisms of HIV transmission during pregnancy and birth are unknown, but 20 to 60 percent of children born to infected mothers also become infected.

The study seeks to determine--

- Frequency of HIV transmission during pregnancy and birth;
- Cofactors--biological, nutritional and environmental--influencing HIV transmission;
- The effect of pregnancy on the course of HIV infection in the mother;
- The effect of maternal HIV disease on pregnancy and the fetus;
- The incidence and clinical spectrum of HIV infection in children.

Led by Dr. Jose Garcia-Castro, principal investigator at University of Puerto Rico, the San Juan research team will recruit a study group of at least 500 women from area hospitals and clinics. These women must be seropositive for HIV or at increased risk of HIV infection and also pregnant or very likely to become pregnant within two years. They will be compared with control groups of HIV-seronegative women who are pregnant or likely to become pregnant. Children born to all women enrolled will also be studied.

The research team will periodically obtain clinical specimens, perform tests for HIV and other infections, and administer physical and neuropsychiatric evaluations. Individual counseling and education will be provided to at-risk women and their families.

Puerto Rico will participate in the multicenter study with the previously funded institutions, which include Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, University of Illinois Hospital in Chicago, and Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center and Presbyterian Hospital in New York.