

Drexel public health school gets \$14 million grant to lead autism research

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Drexel University's School of Public Health won a \$14.3 million federal grant to lead a broad research study of environmental risk factors for autism in pregnant mothers and their babies.

The grant, from the National Institutes of Health, is the biggest in the school's 11-year history.

Craig J. Newschaffer, who left Johns Hopkins University two years ago to chair Drexel's Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, will coordinate the national, multi-institutional study. He will also lead the local portion of the research, to be done at Drexel, the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The grant, to be disbursed over five years, will be used to establish a nationwide network of research sites to examine possible environmental risk factors and whether there is any interplay with genetic susceptibility for the spectrum of autism disorders both before and after birth, Drexel said in a news release yesterday.

All told, the researchers hope to enroll and follow 1,200 mothers of children with autism at the start of another pregnancy and document the newborn child's development through three years of age, according to the NIH.

Enrollment is expected to begin early next year.

The study is one of several projects that the NIH began announcing last year as part of a massive undertaking to try to determine the causes of autism.

The number of children diagnosed with the complex grouping of brain disorders has been increasing rapidly in recent years. Treatments are limited and there is no cure.

More information:

Drexel press release: http://publichealth.drexel.edu/News/SPH_AWARDED_14M_NIH_GRANT_FOR_AUTISM_RESEARCH/586/

NIH press release: <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/apr2008/nimh-01.htm>

Find this article at:

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/breaking/news_breaking/20080402_Drexel_public_health_school_gets_14_million_grant_to_lead_a_utism_research.html?adString=inq.news/news_breaking;!category=news_breaking;&randomOrd=040208062050