

## UCD researchers launch new study

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Posted: 06/09/2009 01:01:12 AM PDT

Scientists at the University of California, Davis, are hoping to close in on the causes of autism as they announce a new study today that will focus on pregnant women.

The UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute will hold a press conference today to announce its EARLI study (Early Autism Risk Longitudinal Investigation), saying it is looking for those families with autistic children and who are currently pregnant or planning another child.

The Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (M.I.N.D.) is an international, multidisciplinary research organization, committed to collaboration and hope, striving to understand the causes and develop better treatments for neurodevelopmental disorders.

The institute has been working on two studies for the last decade and today announces a third study looking at identifying and treating Autism Spectrum Diseases as early as possible.

Unlike previous studies that dealt only with subjects within two hours of Davis or Sacramento, EARLI will team with Kaiser in Northern California as well as Drexel University and John Hopkins University on the East Coast.

By focusing on families before birth, doctors from M.I.N.D. will work hand-in-hand with them throughout the process. Dr. Cheryl Walker, medical director for EARLI, said researchers will study the

diet, activities and exposures during each pregnancy to help find indicators for autism and its spectrum disorders.

"We're there in the delivery room and follow them. At the earliest sign of something, we get them in for more evaluation," Walker said. "They come to us and we develop a strong bond with them."

EARLI is a follow-up to the MARBLES study (Markers of Autism Risk in Babies -- Learning Early Signs) which has been going on for two years, but involves only local families.

That study was actually an offshoot of the CHARGE study (Childhood Autism Risk from Genetics and Environments), which is entering its seventh year. That study compares 1,200 autistic children between the ages of 2 and 5 to those without the disorder but who come from similar backgrounds. It attempts to identify triggers or themes that may cause the disorders.

The problem there, Walker said, is doctors had to rely on the memory of parents. The newest studies have begun earlier in the process.

"We realized if we recruit families with higher risks, we can follow them in real time and they will remember that real well," she said.

Families with autistic children between the ages of 2 and 5 who are interested in participating in the CHARGE study should visit <http://beincharge.ucdavis.edu>, contact [beincharge@ucdavis.edu](mailto:beincharge@ucdavis.edu) or call 866-550-5027.

Families that are pregnant or planning a child and already have an autistic child and are interested in the MARBLES study can visit <http://marbles.ucdavis.edu/>, contact [marbles@ucdavis.edu](mailto:marbles@ucdavis.edu) or call 866-550-5027 or 530-754-0612.

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Similar families are needed for the EARLY study; for information, visit <http://www.earlistudy.org> /Research-Sites/Northern-CA-UC-Davis/35/, contact EARLI@phs.ucdavis.edu or call 866-550-5027 or call 530-752-6511.

Scientific research, however, is not the only news on the horizon when it comes to autism.

Along with scientific studies, several pieces of legislation are working their way through state and federal government. Some of the proposals include:

\* Autism Treatment Acceleration Act (ATAA) -- President Barack Obama promised to address autism and this act would address broad-based federal autism insurance reform.

The bill, now making its way through Congress, would create a demonstration project on community autism care centers where health, education and other services for families with autistic children children could be coordinated. It would also create a similar project for services to autistic adults and require health insurers to cover autism treatments.

\* The ABLE Accounts Act of 2009 (Achieving a Better Life Experience Act) -- Designed to encourage individuals with autism (and other disabilities) and their families to save for disability-related expenses. The ABLE Act is meant to supplement rather than to replace benefits provided by other sources (including Medicaid and private insurance).

\* The Expanding the Promise for Individuals with Autism Act (EPIAA) -- Would provide additional treatment and support resources, increasing access to effective therapies and essential support services for people with autism.

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