

Longitudinal Look At Environment | CPD Blog

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The Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University is partnering with the University of Utah on a landmark project to help researchers better understand children's health. For a year now, data for what is now called the Utah Children's Project has been collected on a number of different factors: the effects of exposure to air pollution and environmental chemicals; stress, sleep and nutrition. This year, researchers added the effects of the microbiome (microorganisms carried on the skin, nasal cavities and the digestive system) to the list of factors being studied. The Utah Children's Project has joined with other research sites around the country in re-enrolling the National Children's Study participants who contributed data from 2009 through 2012. This national effort combines information from former National Children's Study sites in an initiative called the Environmental Influences on Children's Health Outcomes (ECHO). It is funded through the National Institutes of Health, and it continues the longitudinal collection of data for up to seven years. The CPD site enrolled more families in the National Children's Study than any other site in the country. Re-enrollment is going well, said Dr. Mark Innocenti, who directs the research and evaluation division of the CPD. He is leading the Utah Children's Project at the CPD site. "We have a friendly population here in Utah. ... It's nice that they're willing to help move science along." Both ECHO and the Utah Children's Project aim to understand the effects of environment on children's health, from before birth and on into childhood. Thanks to the information collected, future researchers can better understand factors that affect children's health, and in what ways. Data comes to the project via questionnaires, physical exams, swabs and blood draws at the Center for Persons with Disabilities and other sites involved in the Utah Children's Project. The ECHO initiative will examine how the factors might influence gene expression and health through childhood and adolescence, especially as it relates to upper and lower airway health, obesity, neurodevelopment, positive health outcomes and satisfaction with life. The data collected will later be analyzed to answer a number of future research questions, Innocenti said.