

MEDIA RELEASE

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New vaccine trial aims to reduce impact of COVID-19 in healthcare workers

Frontline healthcare workers at The Children's Hospital at Westmead will be the first NSW participants to join the BRACE trial, investigating whether a vaccine traditionally used to treat tuberculosis (TB) can reduce the impacts of COVID-19.

The BRACE trial, launched by Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and endorsed by the World Health Organisation, will test if the Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine can protect healthcare workers exposed to SARS-CoV-2 from developing severe symptoms.

The BCG vaccine is one of the most widely used vaccines in the world, given to over 130 million babies worldwide each year. In addition to preventing TB, this vaccine also boosts immunity to a variety of other infections.

The launch of the trial in NSW has been made possible thanks to a \$350,000 funding commitment from the NSW Health Services Union (HSU). The Children's Hospital at Westmead is the first site to launch the trial in Sydney, officially starting to vaccinate frontline workers this week.

"We have to use every tool available to protect our cleaners, security officers, paramedics, therapists and the hospital workers against the severity of COVID which is why we are so enthusiastically supporting this trial," HSU NSW Secretary, Gerard Hayes, said.

"It may seem unusual for us to fund a program such as this, but we know our duty of care to members extends beyond wages and conditions to include their health and wellbeing.

Dr Rama Kandasamy, Staff Specialist in Immunisation and Paediatrics at Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) is leading the trial at SCHN and is encouraged by the potential benefits of the study as well as the possibilities it opens up for the future.

"Right now, our frontline healthcare workers are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 so we need to find new ways to provide them with the best protection possible, which is what we are hoping the BCG vaccine will do," Dr Kandasamy said.

"We are excited to be the first NSW site to lead this trial, not only because of the potential benefits the trial findings may bring to our healthcare workers, but also because it sets the scene for us to be at the forefront of future COVID-19 specific vaccine trials."

Across Sydney, 500 healthcare workers and paramedics will be recruited for the trial with other Sydney site rollouts including Westmead Hospital, Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, Prince of Wales Hospital and St Vincent's Hospital scheduled in the coming weeks.

In total, the randomised controlled trial will test 10,000 healthcare workers across Australia, and other countries including the Netherlands and Spain. Half of the participants will receive the BCG vaccine while the other half will receive a placebo. Participants will then be tracked over a period of 12 months to record if they contract COVID-19 and the severity of their symptoms.

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“Currently, there are no vaccines or proven preventative interventions available for COVID-19 but if successful, this trial will be a huge step in the right direction. We aim to show that improving ‘innate’ immunity of frontline healthcare workers will lessen the severity of disease should they contract COVID-19,” Dr Kandasamy said.

The results of this trial could also be the key to providing early intervention to protect healthcare workers and other high-risk groups in future novel viral outbreaks.”

The trial’s rapid development and rollout in Australia has been made possible thanks to philanthropic support like that of the NSW HSU, including a \$10 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, \$700,000 from Sarah and Lachlan Murdoch, \$400,000 from The Royal Children’s Hospital Foundation (RCHF), \$1.5M from The Minderoo Foundation, \$200,000 from the South Australian government, as well as support from the NAB Foundation, Calvert-Jones Foundation and individual donors.

Visit the [MCRI website](#) for more information on the BRACE trial.

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