Press Release

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For immediate release

MEDIA RELEASE

Myopia prevention study gets kids outdoors

Fact: More time outdoors protect children against myopia and obesity

With that in mind, a year-long trial study is kicking off shortly to get young children and parents here to spend time together in organised activities at Singapore’s parks and nature reserves on weekends.

Findings from the study will be used by researchers from the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine to develop a programme that is aimed at reducing rates of myopia, obesity and other chronic illnesses in Singapore children.

The study, called the Family Incentive Trial, funded by the National Medical Research Council, is recruiting parents and youngsters between the ages of 6 and 10 for the study, which will see them participate in outdoor activities planned by National Parks Board (NParks).

Leading the trial is Professor Saw Seang Mei, Vice-Dean (Research) at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. “Myopia and physical inactivity are huge public health concerns in Singapore and worldwide. Cultivating a habit in young children to spend time outdoors protects against myopia and decrease the incidence of obesity and other chronic diseases.”

Recent studies suggest that there is a positive correlation between the time children spend outdoors and the protection against myopia. When 6- and 7 year-old children from Sydney and Singapore were compared to assess prevalence and risk factors for myopia, it was found that the prevalence of myopia in the children from Sydney was significantly lower than in Singapore and the most significant factor associated with the difference between the two groups was that children in Sydney spent, on average, 10 hours more per week on outdoor activities.\(^1\)

Taking a leaf from the Australian study, the Family Incentive Trial will see families taken through a planned weekly programme that introduces the children to different parks in Singapore. The outdoor activities families will be able to enjoy range from guided and non-guided walks through gardens and forests to orienteering through Singapore’s parks. To

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track the level of activity, the children and their families will be given pedometers to measure the number of steps they take. They will also be provided with incentives to encourage them to increase their weekly mileage over the period of the study.

And NParks has planned the outings to be interesting and fun-filled. “We are happy to be part of this meaningful study, as we strongly believe that getting into close contact with nature is beneficial to one’s well-being. A wide range of activities has been planned for the children and their families. We hope the participants will have a fun and enjoyable time in our parks and forests, and learn to appreciate and conserve nature too”, says Mr Tay Boon Sin, Assistant Director, Community Parks, NParks.

A total of 450 children from an expected 360 families are being sought to take part in the one-year trial. Families will be randomly selected to join either a family-based structured activity group or a control group with no intervention.

Families with children aged between six and ten years with no major medical conditions, are welcome to participate in this trial.

To participate in this trial and for more information, please call 6516 4985/ 6516 6930/ 9050 3867 or email fit@nus.edu.sg.

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For media enquiries, please contact:

National University Health System
Ms Dawn Sim
Manager, Communications
Tel: +65 6772 3989
Email: dawn_sim@nuhs.edu.sg

Ms Denise Goh
Executive, Communications
Tel: +65 6772 3982
Email: denise_goh@nuhs.edu.sg

National Parks Board
Ms Eta Lauw
Manager, Communications
Tel: +65 6471 7812
Email: Eta_Lauw@nparks.gov.sg