

NEWS RELEASE

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The Sandy Child and Family Health Study researches long-term effects of the superstorm on the health and well-being of NJ residents

NJ Department of Health supports joint research project with Rutgers School of Social Work and the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University

New Brunswick, NJ--The damage caused during Superstorm Sandy in 2012 was immediate, but the aftershocks for New Jersey residents continue in the form of enduring health, economic, environmental and social impacts. To better understand these effects, the New Jersey Department of Health is supporting a joint research team from Rutgers University and Columbia University to conduct The Sandy Child and Family Health (S-CAFH) Study, one of the largest disaster recovery projects and assessments in the region. The research will examine the potential long-term effects of Sandy on the health and well-being of state residents exposed to the storm and also shed light on what has helped or hindered people in their ongoing recovery. The study is modeled on the five-year Gulf Coast Child and Family Health Study that the Columbia University research team conducted after Hurricane Katrina, under the direction of Dr. David Abramson.

"Although Katrina and Sandy were two vastly different storms," noted Columbia University's Abramson, "the impacts might be strikingly similar, particularly when it comes to the enduring mental health effects."

"The stress of continuing recovery efforts coupled with economic losses incurred as a result of the storm can be daunting. These psychological effects can negatively impact an individual's overall health and well-being," said Department of Health Assistant Commissioner Gloria Rodriguez. "This study will provide a better understanding of the impacts of Sandy, so we can better address residents' needs and inform our planning for the future."

In the Sandy Child and Family Health Study community-based interviewers will conduct face-to-face surveys with a random sampling of 1,000 New Jersey households situated in communities that experienced storm surges, flooding or substantial property damage. The bilingual survey

will cover such topics as the decisions households made related to evacuation and recovery issues, to their health and well-being, and to the help they have sought or received. In addition to learning about the adults in the household, the team will also ask specific questions about children living in the house to learn of any long-term impacts.

“This is an important project for ongoing work to give voice to the people of New Jersey to talk about some of the longer-term impacts on families and communities,” said Rutgers University’s Dr. Patricia Findley. “We hear their stories, now we can systematically document their ongoing needs so we can inform policy makers, government leaders, and communities in making decisions to support continued recovery, as well as to plan effectively for future disasters, “ concurred Dr. Donna Van Alst, also from Rutgers University.

To be eligible, selected residents must have lived in the household as their primary residence at the time of the storm.

The primary objectives of the S-CAFH data collection will be to:

- Document the immediate and on-going physical and mental health needs of populations, including children;
- Chronicle their recovery and housing transitions;
- Analyze the types of services that people needed and received, and to identify patterns of current unmet needs or service gaps; and
- Document the pathways to recovery experienced by diverse populations.

Research teams from Rutgers University’s Institute for Families at the School of Social Work and Columbia University’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness at the Earth Institute are leading the Sandy Child and Family Health study. The research faculty from Rutgers and Columbia has been involved in disaster assessment work after many major events, including 9/11; Hurricane Katrina; the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill; the Christchurch, New Zealand earthquakes; the Joplin, Missouri tornado, and Superstorm Sandy.

“What we have seen too often after these catastrophic events,” said Columbia University’s Dr. David Abramson, “is that long-term recovery doesn’t make the news. It’s not even clear to policy-makers and providers what people need in order to recover, much less how well they are doing. S-CAFH will provide that picture to New Jersey communities and officials. It can help build an evidence-base for disaster recovery that is effective and targeted.”

To learn more, you may contact the study directors: David Abramson, PhD, Deputy Director of Columbia University’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness, at dma3@columbia.edu, or Donna Van Alst, PhD, Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation at the Institute for Families in Rutgers’ School of Social Work, at vanalst@ssw.rutgers.edu. More information on the study can be found at www.scafh.org.

Funding for this study is provided through federal Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds.

The Rutgers School of Social Work is the fourth largest school in the country devoted to education and research on social welfare, and is committed to advancing the field of social work through original research. The school's mission is to develop and disseminate knowledge through social work research, education, and training that promotes social and economic justice and strengthens individual, family, and community well-being in this diverse and increasingly global environment of New Jersey and beyond. Visit us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RutgersSSW> or Twitter at <https://twitter.com/RutgersSSW>

Founded in 2003 by Dr. Irwin Redlener, MD, the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Earth Institute works to understand and improve the nation's capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. NCDP focuses on the readiness of governmental and non-governmental systems; the complexities of population recovery; the power of community engagement; and the risks of human vulnerability, with a particular focus on children. NCDP is one of over thirty research centers at the Earth Institute, which under the direction of Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs works to study and create solutions for problems in public health, poverty, energy, ecosystems, climate, natural hazards and urbanization.- See more at: www.ncdp.columbia.edu.

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