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## Tasmanian Longitudinal Health Survey BACKGROUND

- The Tasmanian Longitudinal Health Survey (TAHS), formerly known as the Tasmania Asthma Survey, started in 1968 by surveying all 8,500 children born in Tasmania in 1961 through schools across the State.
- At this time the participant's height, weight and information about health was collected using a survey and a breathing test. Brothers, sisters and parents were also surveyed bringing the total participants in 1968 to 45,900 making the research the largest of its kind in the world.
- In 1974, 7,130 participants who were then 13 years old completed a questionnaire. Of these children, 850 also did breathing tests in a laboratory.
- Another follow-up study was done in 1992 when the study participants were aged 31 years. This time 1,500 answered a questionnaire about their health.
- The most recent follow-up was done in 2004 when all original TAHS participants were recontacted. Initially a postal survey was completed by 5,729 of the original 8,500. This was followed up by a clinical sub-study with over 1200 participants attending a lung function testing laboratory in either Tasmania, Victoria or Queensland. This follow-up is ongoing and due to be completed by the end of 2007.
- The original 1968 TAHS study showed that 16 per cent of children suffered from asthma or wheezy breathing. At the time of the 1992 follow-up study when the participants were 32 years, 75 per cent of those who had asthma at seven years old no longer had it, but one in ten had developed asthma as an adult.
- Factors that seem to predict asthma as an adult include having a history of eczema, low lung volumes, a parent with a history of asthma, asthma during childhood and being female.
- Interestingly, many of the findings suggest that gender plays a large role. Asthma is more common in boys than girls, but it is more common in women than men.
- Having children, contraceptive use, hormonal changes and greater exposure to indoor environment risk factors as a result of the prominent role that women play in household work are some of the factors that have been incriminated for this reversal or risk in males versus females.