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BCG vaccine trial to protect Australian healthcare workers has begun, enabled by major philanthropic backing

News at a Glance:

- The BRACE trial to test whether BCG vaccination reduces the impact of COVID-19 has begun in Melbourne
- 300 staff at the Melbourne Children's Campus of the planned 4000 healthcare workers across Australia have already been included in the trial
- Sarah & Lachlan Murdoch have announced a contribution of \$700,000 to the Murdoch Children's Research Institute trial to enable to it 'beat the pandemic curve'
- The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation has also awarded a \$400,000 grant toward funding the trial
- Further philanthropy is vital to support urgent medical research at this critical time

The [Murdoch Children's Research Institute](#) (MCRI) has started vaccinating healthcare workers as part of a multi-centre randomised clinical trial of the BCG vaccine against COVID-19.

The BRACE trial, announced last week, has already vaccinated over 300 of an eventual 4000 medical workers in hospitals across Australia, half of whom will be given the BCG vaccine.

Sarah and Lachlan Murdoch have donated \$700 000 to the trial, which is designed to test whether BCG, which boosts humans' 'frontline' immunity, can protect healthcare workers exposed to SARS-CoV-2 from developing severe symptoms.

"Supporting medical research and protecting our highly exposed healthcare workforce is essential during this pandemic. Our healthcare workers, scientists and researchers are working around the clock to find the solutions we need so desperately." said MCRI Ambassador and Board Director, Sarah Murdoch.

The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, which awarded a \$400 000 grant, is amongst the other supporters who provided funds to enable the trial's rapid development and rollout at the Melbourne Children's Campus.

The researchers hope to show that improving 'innate' immunity of frontline healthcare workers will

provide crucial time to develop and importantly, validate, a specific anti-COVID-19 vaccine.

Led by [Professor Nigel Curtis](#), a clinician-scientist who leads MCRI's Infectious Diseases Research Group, the BRACE trial builds on previous studies which showed that BCG reduces the viral load, and lessens their symptoms, when people are infected with respiratory viruses similar to SARS-CoV-2.

Professor Curtis said, "The support from Sarah and Lachlan, together with The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, was vital to be able to start our trial on Monday. We needed to be ahead of the pandemic curve to be able to protect our frontline staff, and these vital contributions have allowed us to meet that deadline.

"These sorts of trials normally take around eight to 12 months to start, but with the early support of philanthropy, we were able to start within three weeks.

"Since beginning the BRACE trial we have been inundated with requests from other hospitals wanting to get involved, both in Australia and internationally. The reality is though we will need further funding support to quickly enable these other sites to join."

MCRI Director, Professor Kathryn North, said, "This philanthropic leadership shown by our Ambassador and Board Director Sarah Murdoch, with husband Lachlan and together with The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation and MCRI's valued donors, is vital to support urgent medical research at this critical time."

"I invite further support to fund the expansion of this trial and other COVID-19 projects we are undertaking. We are all in a race against time."

Sarah said, "Australia is home to some of the best medical researchers in the world and we are proud to support them at this time when the whole world is looking to science for the answers."

"The RCH Foundation is proud to support the BRACE Trial. We know our healthcare workers play a crucial and life-saving role in caring for our community during these unprecedented times. We hope, like all of us, that the BCG vaccine will help to reduce the severity of COVID-19 amongst our heroic healthcare workforce," said Sue Hunt, Chief Executive Officer, RCH Foundation

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

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Available for interview:

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About MCRI

The Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) is the largest child health research institute in Australia committed to making discoveries and developing treatments to improve child and adolescent health in Australia and around the world. MCRI pioneers new treatments, trials better vaccines and improves ways of diagnosing and helping sick babies, children and adolescents. MCRI is one of the only research institutes in Australia to offer genetic testing to find answers for families of children with previously undiagnosed conditions.

About The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Foundation is the fundraising arm of the RCH. We raise, manage and distribute money to enable the RCH and its campus partners, The [Murdoch Children's Research Institute](#) and [The University of Melbourne Department of Paediatrics](#), to push the boundaries of paediatric healthcare. Find out more at www.rchfoundation.org.au

About Melbourne Children's

The Melbourne Children's Campus physically brings together four organisations; [The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne](#), the [Murdoch Children's Research Institute](#), the [University of Melbourne, Department of Paediatrics](#) and [The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation](#) at a single, purpose-built and multi-award winning campus in the city of Melbourne. The purpose of Melbourne Children's is to collaborate, as world leaders, in advancing child and adolescent health through prevention, early intervention and health promotion, together with the highest quality clinical care, outstanding research and comprehensive education and training.