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## Monash and Hudson Institute teams' world-first for newborns

New research offers treatment for seizures in newborns that helps protect their developing brain from further injury

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2 min read October 29, 2022 - 1:42PM

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Dr Tamara Yawno-Fegan is leading exciting research that may help treat devastating seizures in newborns. Picture: Supplied

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Melbourne scientists have discovered a way to treat seizures in newborns that will not only help protect their developing brain from further injury, but may also provide the first new, safe and effective treatment in decades.

World-first research by a team at the Hudson Institute of Medical Research's Ritchie Centre and Monash University's Department of Paediatrics and Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology has just published the results of their groundbreaking study in the Annals of Neurology.

In this preclinical study, the team found an existing synthetic drug called ganaxolone – now used internationally to treat epilepsy in adults and young children – may also help improve seizure management in babies under four weeks

children - may also help improve seizure management in babies under four weeks of age. Seizures are more common in the neonatal period than at any other stage of life.



Senior author Dr Tamara Yawno-Fegan is excited about ganaxolone's potential. Picture: Supplied

Senior author Dr Tamara Yawno-Fegan says around 10 per cent of newborns with neurological disorders in Australia are diagnosed with seizures every year. She says this study provides clinicians with the hope of a potential alternative treatment.

She said the study provided strong evidence that ganaxolone not only reduced seizure burden, but also protected the developing brain. The study was funded by an NHMRC grant and also a \$255,000 grant from the Cerebral Palsy Alliance as seizures in neonates are strong predictors of long-term cognitive and developmental impairment like cerebral palsy.

The preclinical study found ganaxolone treatment resulted in a greater than 80 per cent reduction in the number of seizures compared to the untreated group and seizures were shorter.

“There is a desperate need for research into new therapies that are both effective and safe for seizure management in newborn infants,” Dr Yawno-Fegan said. “No one has managed to do a comprehensive study comparing ganaxolone with phenobarbital, the current first line treatment, until now.”

Phenobarbital has been around since 1912 and is the oldest epilepsy medication still in use.

Dr Yawno-Fegan said what was so exciting about ganaxolone's potential was that it may offer multiple benefits.

“We think within the next two years we will be ready to start human clinical trials,” Dr Yawno-Fegan said.

“It is always harder doing clinical studies on young babies, but we have the support from the team at Monash Children's Hospital, whose input has been essential for the design and implementation of this study.”

Results from this work, she said, will not only

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help reduce the incidence of neonatal seizures, \_\_\_\_\_  
but was also aimed to reduce lifelong  
disabilities that are associated with the presence of seizures in the neonatal  
period.

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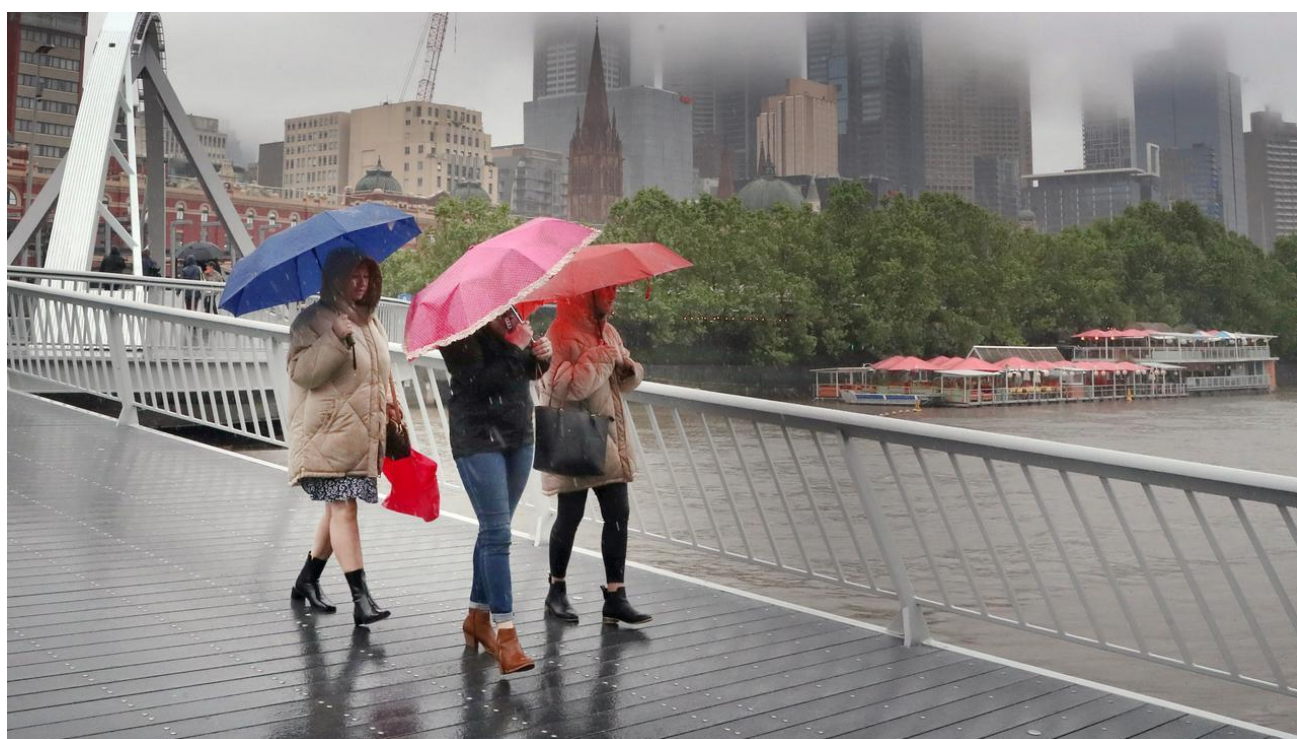
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