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NEW STUDY LOOKS AT HOW CHILDREN COMMUNICATE WHEN THEY ARE IN PAIN

Vancouver – A new study at the B.C. Research Institute for Children's & Women's Health is using a variety of tools to measure how children describe pain. Young children between 3 and 6 years of age often don't have the verbal skills to communicate the type of pain or magnitude of discomfort they are experiencing.

"Currently there is not a lot of data available on the 3 to 6 age group so the results of this study will be very helpful in treating young patients in hospital," says Dr. Christine Chambers, a researcher at B.C.'s Children's Hospital and the B.C. Research Institute for Children's & Women's Health. "Quite often a four year old does not know what the word pain means. Through this study we'll measure the ability of healthy children to describe their awareness and experience of pain. Once this study is complete, we hope to extend this research to the study of children who commonly experience pain from procedures or disease."

Pain assessment is the first step in treating a child. One of the common approaches is to ask children directly how much pain they are feeling. As the response may depend on vocabulary, language and arithmetic skills, researchers will measure these skills to determine how they relate to a child's ability to answer questions about pain. At no point is any kind of experiential pain used to collect data for this study.

"It's sad to think of young children in pain, especially when they don't have the skills with which to describe what is happening to them," says Elizabeth Job, a graduate student working with Dr. Chambers and based at the B.C. Research Institute for Children's & Women's Health. "The results of this study will be used to give parents and hospital staff more resources to assess the needs of young children in pain."

Space is still available in the study for healthy participants aged 3 to 6 years who will be asked to come to Children's & Women's Health Centre of B.C. for approximately an hour. The study ends in April.

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