

January 12, 2010

Media Statement

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHERS PROBE RED-BACK SPIDER BITE TREATMENT

Australian researchers are asking for community help in a landmark study aimed at improving the treatment of red back spider bites.

The three-year trial is being run by a national collaboration including 17 hospitals across WA and New South Wales*. In Western Australia it is overseen by the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research's (WAIMR) Centre for Clinical Research in Emergency Medicine at Royal Perth Hospital.

WA-based trial co-investigator Professor Simon Brown said the study would look at how to ensure red back spider bite victims got the best treatment.

"About 5,000 red back spider bite cases are seen in emergency departments across Australia each year costing the health system up to \$1 million, so it's a significant issue," he said.

"The concern is that even with the current treatment process, which can include antivenom and pain relief, many patients have persistent, severe pain for two to four days.

Professor Brown said the main focus of the trial was to determine how much red back spider antivenom, as it is currently given, relieves pain over and above standard pain relief medications.

"At present, we do not know if red back spider antivenom works very well when given into a vein," he said.

"If our study shows that antivenom does not work very well this way then in the future we might look at injecting it closer to where the bite actually occurred."

The study aims to recruit 240 patients over three years from 17 hospitals across the country.

"We're asking anyone over the age of eight who's bitten by a redback spider in WA this summer to consider presenting to one of the hospital Emergency Departments taking part in the trial," he said.

The largest number of redback spider bite cases appears to occur in Perth, Brisbane, Central Australia, outer suburbs of Sydney and the Hunter Region.

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Natalie Papadopoulos, WAIMR Media Consultant, 0407 984 435

***HOSPITALS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY**

NEW SOUTH WALES (Coordinated by A/Prof Geoffrey Isbister, Calvary Mater Newcastle / University of Newcastle)
Calvary Mater Newcastle Hospital/Maitland Hospital
John Hunter Hospital/Belmont Hospital
Coffs Harbour Hospital
Liverpool, Fairfield and Campbelltown Hospitals.
Prince of Wales Hospital
Westmead and Nepean Hospitals
WESTERN AUSTRALIA (Coordinated by Prof Simon Brown, WAIMR)
Royal Perth Hospital
Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital
Fremantle Hospital
Rockingham Hospital
Armadale Hospital
Bunbury Hospital

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Natalie Papadopoulos
WAIMR Media Consultant
m0407 984 435