

NIH Awards Tulane University \$6.5 Million to Study Oil Spill Impact on Women's Health

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The NIH's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences has awarded Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine \$6.5 million for a five-year study exploring the potential health impacts of the Deepwater Horizon disaster on pregnant women and women of reproductive age living in Louisiana's coastal parishes.

The grant creates the Transdisciplinary Research Consortium for Gulf Resilience on Women's Health (GROWH) at Tulane. GROWH will quantify potential exposure levels among women to environmental contaminants via seafood consumption and air emissions; study how disasters affect reproduction decisions and explore how environmental and social disparities affect women's health and pregnancies. This is the first long-term study to examine the effects of a major oil spill on pregnant women and women's health, says principal investigator Dr. Maureen Lichtveld, Freeport McMoRan Chair of Environmental Policy for Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

"Pregnant women are always a population of concern when there are environmental exposures as the developing fetus may be vulnerable to even small doses of contaminants," Lichtveld says. "To our knowledge, this is also the first study to examine maternal stress and anxiety related to a major oil spill and the associated effects on birth outcomes, fetal health and family planning behavior."

The study covers Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St Bernard and Terrebonne parishes. GROWH will partner with community groups to conduct its research.

"The entire research consortium is centered around community-based participatory research," Lichtveld says. "Our communities will help design the studies, are active

partners in implementing the studies and will play a leadership role in translating and disseminating the study results. This assures that we make science work for our communities.”

GROWH will work with Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation, Bayou Interfaith Sharing Community Organizing and Women Infant and Children (WIC) Clinics in the affected parishes to conduct the study.