

Tulane awarded \$3 million to study impact of pollutants in Caribbean countries

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The National Institutes of Health awarded a \$3 million grant to Tulane University and the Academic Hospital Paramaribo in the Caribbean nation of Suriname to establish a center to study how neurotoxins from mining and agricultural development are affecting pregnant women and child health throughout the Caribbean.

[Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) and Suriname's largest hospital will establish the Caribbean Consortium for Research in Environmental Health and Occupational Health to recruit 1,000 pregnant women whose diet might expose them to mercury, lead, arsenic and several pesticides, says [Dr. Maureen Lichtveld](#), who holds the Freeport McMoRan Chair of Environmental Policy at Tulane.

"In many developing countries such as Suriname, pregnant women depend on fish and produce locally caught or grown that are contaminated as a result of unsafe mining and farming practices," says Lichtveld, principal investigator.

The center will follow the children born to mothers in the study from birth to age four to examine how chemical exposure affects their brain development. The goal is to provide government officials with sound data on the health impact of environmental pollutants on residents so officials can make better informed policy decisions.

"Suriname does not have any national environmental health policies in place and that is true for many other Caribbean countries," Lichtveld says.

The findings will be disseminated throughout the Caribbean through the Caribbean Public Health Agency.

The grant is part of a \$20.9 million effort [announced this week](#) by the NIH and other U.S. and Canadian partners to establish seven regional research and training centers in low- and middle-income countries to address environmental or occupational

health issues. The centers will be based in India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Ethiopia, Peru, Ghana and Suriname.

“Our grant is the first NIH grant for a project in Suriname,” Lichtveld says.