

HAZELWOOD SCHOOLS STUDY

Parent/guardian/carer information sheet

Your consent

You and your child are invited to take part in the Hazelwood Schools Study, undertaken by a research team at Monash University. This information sheet has been written to help you decide if you will consent for your child to participate, and if you yourself are willing to participate in the study. Please read this information carefully and feel free to ask any questions before signing the enclosed consent form.

Background to the study

During February and March 2014, a coal fire burned in the Hazelwood Mine causing a period of smoky conditions in the Latrobe Valley. The Hazelwood Health Study is a research program that will investigate whether the smoke from the fire has affected the health of local residents. There are three main studies in the overall research program:

1. The Hazelwood Schools Study
2. The Latrobe Early Life Follow-up Study (ELF)
3. The Hazelwood Adult Survey and Health Record Linkage Study

You and your child are being asked to participate in the Hazelwood Schools Study. You may be invited to participate in one or more of the other parts of this research program. The Hazelwood Schools Study aims to explore the impact of the smoke on children and adolescents. In particular, we are interested in exploring the relationship between children's level of exposure to the smoke, and their wellbeing and academic outcomes. Therefore, an important part of our study is for you, as the parent of a child living in the Latrobe Valley, to answer questions about where your child was living and went to school at the time of the Hazelwood mine fire.

It is also important that we survey children with different levels of exposure to the smoke and from across the Latrobe Valley to understand the smoke impacts. **This means that we will be including children who had little or no exposure to the smoke, or who were not living in the area at the time of the Hazelwood mine fire.**

Funding for this project has been provided by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. However, the research team has independence in undertaking the study and access to the full dataset is restricted to the research team only. This project has been approved by the principal at your child's school. This project has also been approved by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Office: Diocese of Sale, and Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.

What the study involves

Students in grades 3, 5, 7 and 9 from schools in Morwell, Moe-Newborough, Traralgon and Churchill are being invited to participate. Participation will involve your child completing a questionnaire of about 40 minutes about the impact of the Hazelwood mine fire, their coping strategies at home and at school, their relationships with others and their ability to manage emotions.

Your child will be invited to participate in the same study every two years. Please contact your child's school if you would like to see the questionnaire. Your child will also be given their own information sheet and the project will be explained to them before they are asked to consent to complete the questionnaire at school, in the presence of a researcher and/or teacher. Finally, your child may be asked to participate in an interview with a researcher during school time. The interview will explore your child's experience of the Hazelwood mine fire, and if anything worried or upset them.

You and your child's teacher are also being asked to complete a questionnaire about your child's wellbeing. The questionnaire for parents will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Information about your family, including family history of trauma and mental illness, and your child's whereabouts at the time of the fire, will allow us to identify factors that may impact on the wellbeing of children and families after the smoke event. Please see the attached consent form asking you to participate. You can complete the Parent/Guardian/Carer Questionnaire online if you prefer. Links are provided on the website on which this document is posted or on page 2 of this information sheet.

Data from your child's school and the Department of Education and Training, as well as their NAPLAN results will also be accessed to explore the relationships between your child's level of exposure to the smoke, their wellbeing and academic outcomes.

Possible benefits and risks of the study

This project will help us to understand what, if any, impacts were experienced by school children as a result of the smoke, and will help to inform health and educational responses to future emergency events in the community. Therefore, this project will help to strengthen relief and recovery activities during and following emergency events.

No foreseeable risk will result from participation in this project. However, should your child become distressed as a result of this study, we suggest that you talk to your child or have your child speak to one of the qualified counsellors who work at Kids Helpline (1800 551 800). A researcher will conduct the interviews with children and a researcher and/or teacher will be available on the day that your child completes the questionnaire.

A list of resources about maintaining good mental health will also be given to your child should they participate. Our earlier work in similar areas suggests that children enjoy completing these kinds of questionnaires, and find it helpful and enjoyable to express their thoughts and feelings.

Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure of information

If you choose to participate in the Hazelwood Schools Study, information may be shared with other researchers involved in the Hazelwood Health Study research program, to better understand the impact of the mine fire across the community.

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We may also contact you in the future to be part of one of our follow-up studies looking at particular groups or conditions. You will be under no obligation to participate in any further proposed studies.

The results of this study will be published and/or communicated based on group findings. This means that neither you nor your child will be identified and no personal information will be revealed in any presentation or publication of the findings. You and your child will be assigned a code that is unique to you. This code will be used so that we do not know who you are when we analyse the data.

Questionnaires and consent forms will be securely stored and accessible only by the researchers, until your child is at least 25 years of age, in accordance with Monash University and Department of Education and Training guidelines. Questionnaires and consent forms will be shredded prior to their disposal. Data may be used for future research purposes, however all data will be anonymous.

Participation is voluntary

Being in this study is voluntary and you and your child are under no obligation to agree to take part. However, the greater the proportion of parents/guardians and students who do take part, the greater the power of the study to identify the potential health and educational impacts, if any. If you let us know that you do not wish to take part in the study, we will make sure that you are not contacted by the Hazelwood Schools Study team again regarding this child's participation in the project.

You may be invited to participate in other aspects of the Hazelwood Health Study involving infants or adults; however, you will have the option not to take part in these studies.

If you decide that your child may participate and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw your child from the project at any stage. Your decision to take part or not, or to take part and then withdraw from the study, will not impact upon your relationship with your child's school. Should you choose for your child not to participate, they will be given the option of doing a different activity while the other students complete the questionnaire.

You are also under no obligation to provide consent for your child's teacher to answer questions about your child, and you and your child may still participate even if you decide that your child's teacher may not. You can also give permission for your child to participate even if you choose not to. If you and your child agree to participate, you and your child may withdraw from further participation at any stage, but you will only be able to withdraw your information prior to the publication of any project reports.

Communicating the results of the project

Results of this project will be communicated to participating schools via a written report. We will also offer to provide a presentation to parents, teachers and students if the school principal requests one, and will maintain contact with you every two years through reports in the school's newsletter. The research findings will also be publicised regularly through community updates, newsletters and media notices, as well as on the study website (hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au).

Questions or complaints about the study

If you have any questions about the project, please contact Dr Emily Berger on 03 5128 1026 or email med.hazelwoodschoollstudy@monash.edu.

If you have any complaints about this project, please contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC):

Building 3e, Room 111,
Research Office
Monash University Victoria 3800

Tel: 03 9905 2052

Fax: 03 9905 3831

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Mrs Julie Irvine (School of Rural Health)*

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Please complete the attached consent form and return it to your child's school as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

Want to complete the questionnaire online?

If you would like to complete the questionnaire online, please go to:
https://monashmnh.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eL13ZGpDJglu0mx
if your child is in year 3 or year 5, or
https://monashmnh.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_0He5S984tBGPAOI
if your child is in year 7 or year 9.