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Melbourne researchers find potential cancer-prevention breakthrough

VIC NEWS

US foundation funds nine Melbourne hospitals' research into immunodeficiency

Brigid O'Connell, Herald Sun

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PATIENTS with a rare immune system deficiency are not typically diagnosed until nine years after their first symptom — a costly delay researchers say can significantly reduce their chance of survival.

But a consortium of nine Melbourne hospitals, medical research institutes and universities is being funded by a US foundation to start a research centre into primary immunodeficiency disease.

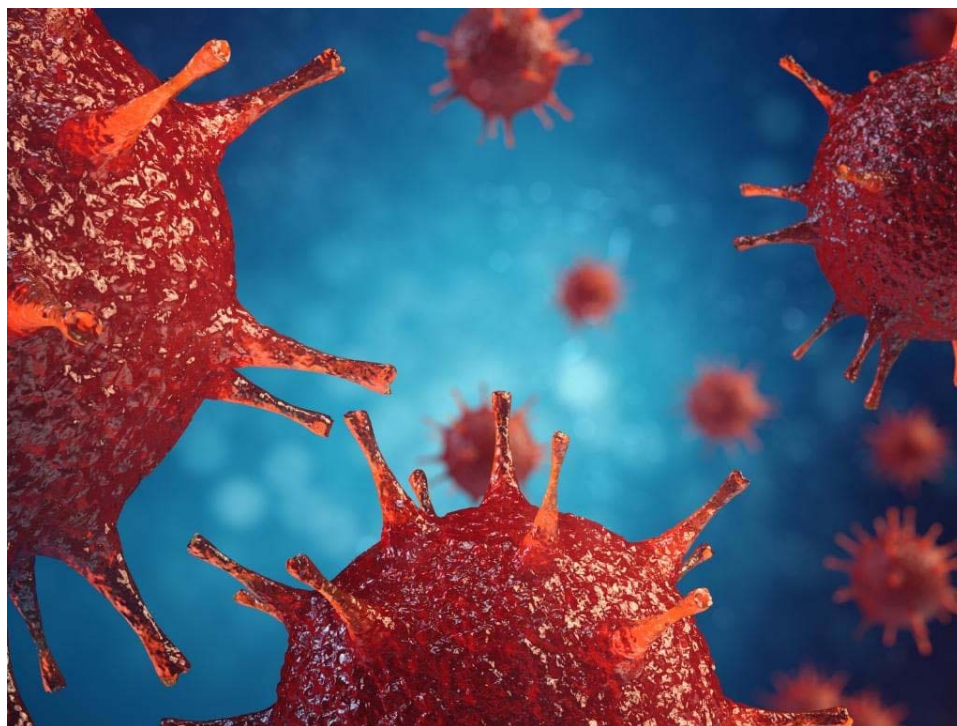
The aim of the Jeffrey Modell Diagnostic and Research Centre is to fast-track treatment of the one in 25,000 Australians with one of these cluster of debilitating genetic diseases, allowing for earlier diagnosis while also educating doctors.

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Centre director, Associate Professor Menno van Zelm from the Department of Immunology and Pathology at Monash University and The Alfred, said given this was a cluster of diseases that most doctors would only see once or twice in their career, it was vital that awareness was boosted of the symptoms and diagnostic tests available.



The aim of the Jeffrey Modell Diagnostic and Research Centre is to fast-track treatment of the one in 25,000 Australians with immunodeficiency diseases.

“The difficulty of the disease is that it presents as an infection — and everybody will have an infection — and it presents so differently in each patient,” Associate Prof van Zelm said.

At the severe end, when there is early onset of infections that won't clear, patients often need bone marrow transplants. The disease can appear at any age and can affect multiple aspects of the immune system, from recurring colds, skin lesions and sinus problems, through to infections in the gut or brain.

One focus of the centre will be to look at whether new treatments used for cancer or autoimmune conditions could also make inroads into the diseases.

The Melbourne-based research centre opens today. It involves The Alfred, the Royal Children's Hospital, Monash Health, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Monash University, the Burnett Institute and the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research.



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