

NZ invests \$10 M in vaccine development for rheumatic diseases

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Scientists to tackle one of the country's glaring health inequities

New Zealand (NZ) based University of Auckland's medical faculty will lead a multi-million dollar government-funded project to support vaccine development to help prevent rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease. The initiative tackles one of the nation's glaring health inequities.

Rheumatic fever starts from a strep throat infection, and causes the heart, joints, brain and skin to become inflamed and swollen.

Funding of \$10 million will also support activities such as enhanced surveillance of Strep A, more infrastructure for laboratory testing, and preparations to ensure New Zealand is ready to conduct clinical trials.

In 2020/21, 107 people were hospitalised for the first time with rheumatic fever in New Zealand. People who've caught rheumatic fever need to have monthly antibiotic injections for at least 10 years, to prevent it from returning and developing into rheumatic heart disease.