

Funding boost for study on early childhood allergies in Singapore

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Designing new interventions to prevent the development of allergies



A team of scientists led by Associate Professor Ashley St John from Duke-NUS' Emerging Infectious Diseases Programme in Singapore, has received a S\$1 million award to investigate early childhood allergies.

The project is one of three promising research projects awarded by the Tanoto Foundation Medical Research Fund, to propel it to the next stage.

The Fund formalises the Foundation's commitment to medical research, Bey Soo Kiang, Tanoto Foundation's executive advisor, said in an interview with CNA. Through the Fund, the Foundation will disburse S\$5 million every year to support medical research projects for a period of three years.

The hope is, said Bey, that at the end of the funding period, the researchers "can look for more funding from the government to roll out their discoveries to the healthcare system either through a clinical trial or directly".

For Assoc Prof St John and her two collaborators Professors Florent Ginhoux from A*STAR and Jerry Chan (as seen in the image) from KK Women's and Children's Hospital, the award enables them to investigate whether the same connection they observed in a preclinical model back in 2020 exists in humans.

In 2020, the trio found that a mother's allergic responses can be transferred to the offspring.

"This meant that after birth, the offspring could experience allergies to the same allergens that the mom had develop allergies to originally," explained Assoc Prof St John, who was recently recognised with the National Research Foundation Investigatorship Award.

And human fetuses have all the necessary building blocks required to raise an allergic response even before birth. With this award, the team now hopes to determine whether the same holds true for mother-to-child transmission of allergies in early human life.