

MEDIA RELEASE – Wednesday 27th May, 2015

## THE SUNSHINE STATE SHOWCASES QUEENSLAND'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST YOUNG SCIENTISTS TODAY

Bankcroft Centre, QIMRBerghofer Medical Research Institute

### You are what you eat from

When thinking about the causes of childhood obesity, it's natural to consider what foods children are eating. The container in which these foods are stored rarely comes to mind. Alarming, research from Dr. Bridget Maher at the University of Queensland has shown that a synthetic chemical frequently added to household plastics, including in children's toys, baby bottles and food containers, is linked to an increased risk of childhood obesity. Maher and colleagues analysed existing data from nearly 5000 children on the effects of the chemical Bisphenol A, finding that children with the highest levels of exposure to Bisphenol A had a 40% greater risk of obesity than children with the lowest levels of exposure. The findings have important public and child health implications, and provide a compelling case for a contributory role of Bisphenol A in the childhood obesity epidemic.

### Improving outcomes for spinal cord injuries

Rugby league fans watched in horror last year as Newcastle Knights rising star Alex McKinnon suffered spinal cord injury as a result of a tackle gone wrong. While McKinnon has since made steady progress in his rehabilitation, a major factor that impedes recovery in many cases is the excessive acute inflammatory response triggered as a result of spinal cord injury. Recent research by Faith Brennan and colleagues at the University of Queensland has shown that transfusion of a blood product known as intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) can attenuate this harmful inflammatory response and improve functional recovery in an animal model of spinal cord injury. The findings indicate that IVIG is a promising candidate for clinical trials in patients with spinal cord injury.

### A new vaccine for herpes?

Each year more than 18 million people are infected with Herpes Simplex Virus 2 (HSV-2); in some, this infection can be fatal. However an effective vaccine may be within reach, according to recent research at the Queensland University of Technology. The key lies in eliciting mucosal immunity through mucosal immunisation, rather than by injection. Peter Mulvey and colleagues have shown that oral immunisation elicits an effective immune response in the genital tract, and that in mice this protects against genital herpes. While further studies are still required, this vaccine has the potential to protect the billions of people currently at risk of HSV-2 infection.

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