

Newsletter

Summer 2026



It's summertime! We at the HBCD Study hope you're enjoying time with your families and can't wait to see how the little ones in the study continue to grow and change during the rest of the year. In this newsletter, we discuss biospecimen data collection, share recent findings, and highlight one of our sites.

Biospecimens in the HBCD Study

The HBCD Study collects *biospecimens* from participants throughout the study. Moms give samples of their blood, urine, saliva, and nail clippings before birth; saliva and nail clippings after birth; and saliva at each in-person visit after. Study scientists also collect urine, saliva, and stool from participating children at in-person visits.

"Different samples tell us different things, which is why we need to collect multiple types," says Dr. Ludmila Bakhireva, a leader of the HBCD Study site at the [University of New Mexico](#). "For example, nail clippings allow us to look back at past exposures. All samples are used to enhance what participants tell us."



Did you know?

HBCD is a **longitudinal study**. This type of study follows the same group of people over a long period of time.



These samples allow HBCD researchers to ask and answer a variety of questions. They can study topics such as nutrition and discover exposures to toxic heavy metals like lead during pregnancy or early childhood. Stool samples even allow researchers to study the community of microbes, like bacteria, that naturally live in the digestive system. This is an important study question because gut bacteria can change brain structure and development!

Researchers will compare what they learn through biospecimen studies to other HBCD Study results, such as MRI, to make connections to variations in brain structure or activity. With this information, they could learn what children are vulnerable to and how to protect children's health.

You can read more about how HBCD researchers [plan to use the biospecimens they collect](#) here.

Did you know?

When HBCD Study data are used for research, the data are **de-identified**, meaning personal information like names, birthdays, addresses, study visit dates, or any other identifying details are completely private and will never be shared.



Data Digest

Key findings from the HBCD Study

HBCD Study scientists analyzed survey and biospecimen data from more than 1,400 parents participating in the HBCD Study to better understand substance use during pregnancy.¹

Using alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, illicit drugs, or medications other than as prescribed during pregnancy is unsafe for babies. Over 12% (**1 in 8**) used alcohol at some point during pregnancy. About 5% (**1 in 20**) used alcohol and at least one other substance at some point during pregnancy.

Those who reported drinking alcohol and using other substances also reported higher stress levels, financial difficulties, and poorer mental health.

Your doctor may ask you about substance use or your overall mental health. Getting support can help both you and baby thrive.

Want to learn more? You can [read the journal article](#) here.



If you're struggling with mental health, substance use disorder, or having trouble financially, there are resources available to you.



The [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) is a free resource that will confidentially connect you with a trained counselor by phone, text, or online chat in English or Spanish.

988
SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE



[Postpartum Support International](#) is an organization that can help you find trained mental health professionals, online support groups with other parents, a peer mentor program, and a free and confidential maternal mental health hotline.



The federal [Benefits Finder tool](#) can help you learn which benefits your family may qualify for, such as Medicaid (a joint federal and state program that helps cover medical costs for some people with limited income and resources), WIC (a federal assistance program that provides resources like food, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support), and more.



[FASD United](#) is a national organization that offers free, confidential support and practical tools for families caring for children affected by prenatal alcohol exposure. It can help you learn more about fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), understand your child's needs, and find services and supports in your area.



For more about the HBCD Study data in action, scan the QR code to check out our publications page!



¹. Bakhireva LN, Ma X, Psaras C, et al. Substance use patterns among individuals who consume alcohol during pregnancy: Results from a US multi-site study. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2026;282:113101. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2026.113101



Site Spotlight

New York University Langone Health

Drs. Moriah Thomason, Obianuju Berry, and Lauren Shuffrey lead the HBCD Study team at [New York University \(NYU\) Langone Health](#). Together, they have more than 25 years of experience studying infant and child brain development.

To make the study experience easier on both children and caregivers, participants at this site complete visits in welcoming, child-friendly, and well-equipped spaces, including NYU's neuroscience lab and scanning center.



Members of the HBCD Study staff at NYU gathered for a community event.

By **returning for study visits**, even after a missed visit, families help HBCD researchers learn the full story of childhood development. The HBCD study team from the University of New Mexico site explains why in [this YouTube video](#). They also share the multiple ways they help accommodate study participants.



The team recognizes that HBCD research would not be possible without families' time and trust, so they offer several supports to participants. They connect families to outside resources and provide transportation as needed for all study visits. In addition, the site offers meals and overnight hotel accommodations for longer and late-night visits. Their donation closet also provides diapers, wipes, clothes, toys, and supplies for moms and babies.

The NYU Langone study team recently hosted a themed community event where participating families gathered to hear updates about HBCD, participate in community-building activities, and receive resources focused on mom and baby's wellbeing.



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