**Infant simulators fail to reduce pregnancy**

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 5AM AEST FRIDAY AUGUST 26

A Telethon Kids Institute study has found a popular education programme where teenagers care for a “robot” baby fails to reduce teen pregnancy, and could in fact increase the risk of pregnancy.

Nearly 3,000 Western Australian school girls aged 13-15 participated in the randomised control trial to assess the Virtual Infant Parenting (VIP) programme, the results of which were published today in *The Lancet*.

Close to half were given the VIP programme as the intervention group, while the control group was given the standard health education curriculum.

Researchers were given permission to access the participants’ de-identified medical records until they were 20 years of age to determine whether they had experienced a pregnancy.

They found those who did the VIP programme had higher rates of pregnancy (17%) compared to those who did not (11%), a small but statistically significant increase.

53.8% of the pregnancies in the intervention group ended in termination, compared to 60.1% in the control group, which researchers say is not statistically significant but does show the participants who had exposure to the program were more likely to trend towards going through with the pregnancy.

Lead Investigator Dr Sally Brinkman said the study showed just how important it was that intervention-based programs are scientifically evaluated for their effectiveness.

“The Virtual Infant Parenting Programme is used across Australia and the world because it is thought to reduce rates of teen pregnancy,” Dr Brinkman said. “This is the largest study of its kind and highlights that even the most well intentioned programs can have unexpected consequences.”

“Australia has the sixth highest teen pregnancy rate out of 21 OECD countries and this study will help policy makers better tackle the issue.”

Dr Brinkman said the intervention was implemented from 2003 to 2006, after a pilot study indicated the VIP Programme was effective, and was stopped as soon as early indications suggested the intervention was failing.

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**About Telethon Kids Institute:**

The Telethon Kids Institute is one of the largest, and most successful medical research institutes in Australia, comprising a dedicated and diverse team of more than 500 staff and students.

We've created a bold blueprint that brings together community, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and funders, who share our vision to improve the health and wellbeing of children through excellence in research.

The Institute is headed by leading paediatrician and infectious diseases expert Professor Jonathan Carapetis, with Founding Director Professor Fiona Stanley now Patron.

Telethon Kids is independent and not-for-profit. The majority of funding comes from our success in winning national and international competitive research grants.  We also receive significant philanthropic support from corporate Australia and the community.