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Picture: Mark Stewart

Diabetes test leap

EXCLUSIVE
Robyn Riley

An at-home type 1 diabetes test pioneered by Melbourne scientists is set to revolutionise screening for the disease around the world.

A trial of the simple finger-prick blood test confirms it works, is accurate and amounts to a cheap, reliable population screening test that could be available within two years.

"We found this blood spot test worked and was the preferred method of detection by the families involved," clinical scientist John Wentworth said. "It has the potential to decrease the cost of early diagnosis, increase the reach of screening programs and accelerate development and deployment of effective immunotherapies."

FULL REPORT, PAGE 5

COURT HEARS 12-year-old girl charged with stabbing murder fled from care 275 times, had history of violence and was ...

RUNNING WILD

Ashley Argoon

A 12-year-old girl charged with murder last month had gone missing from state care for more than a fortnight and was "significantly substance affected" when she allegedly stabbed a woman to death in Footscray.

Damning new details of the girl's history - which the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing fought to keep secret -

can now be revealed after a Supreme Court judge lifted a gag order on Friday.

The girl, who cannot be named, ran away from carers, on average, twice a week in the years before she allegedly killed a woman, 37, on November 16. The court also heard allegations there were reports of escalating violent behaviour made in the 20 months before her arrest.

FULL REPORT, PAGE 6



Jasper rains on tourism

Jeremy Pierce
Greg Stolz

Holiday hotspots hundreds of kilometres from the impact zone of Cyclone Jasper have reported multimillion-dollar wipe-outs as travellers cancel Christmas getaways, prompting pleas from Queensland tourism operators for holiday-makers to keep their bookings.

Operators from as far south as the Whitsundays – 650km away from Cairns – have been left to lament wide-scale cancellations as some potential visitors assume all of northern Queensland is a no-go zone.

Tourists will be offered discounted airfares and accommodation to take a Tropical North Queensland holiday as part of a \$5m recovery package, but other regions have also moved to reassure holiday-makers that they're well and truly open for business.

Tourism Whitsundays chief executive Rick Hamilton said the region had taken a multimillion-dollar hit.

"We've experienced upward of \$10m in cancellations ... but we are open and welcoming guests who can experience the Whitsundays for an incredible summer holiday," he said.

Tourism and Events Queensland chief executive Patricia O'Callaghan said it was important people did not make hasty cancellations.

"As of right now, more than 85 per cent of tourism operators in Cairns are back up and running," she said.

Myki fares to rise again

Public transport fares will be hiked even further in the new year as the government scours to find extra funds to plug its growing debt problem.

It will be the second price hike in just six months after Myki fares increased in July.

The state opposition has slammed the government and said the price hikes were further proof the state was broke.

The daily Myki fare is \$10 and although the government refused to declare how much the new fare would be, Public Transport Minister Gabrielle Williams said the increase would be in line with CPI.

Easy diabetes test at our fingertips

Melbourne team in breakthrough

EXCLUSIVE
Robyn Riley

An at-home type 1 diabetes test pioneered by Melbourne scientists will revolutionise screening for the disease around the world.

A trial of the simple fingerprick blood test confirms it works, is accurate and amounts to a cheap, reliable population screening test that could be available within two years.

Newport mum Torie, who asked not to have her surname used, encouraged daughters Matilda, 9, and Alice, 6, to be among the 100 Victorians who took part in the trial.

Participants were given instructions asking them to prick their fingers, collect drops of blood, place them on cards and mail them for testing to identify type 1 diabetes antibodies.

The two youngsters, who do not have diabetes, hate blood tests "with a passion" but were motivated to help others.

"I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes as an adult; it is something in your brain every minute of every day," Torie said.

"As someone who has to have jabs and fingerpick tests all the time, I thought it was pretty straightforward. For them, it was intentionally hurting themselves to get blood to come out, so it wasn't something they wanted to do."

Led by Royal Melbourne Hospital endocrinologist and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute clinical scientist John Wentworth, the study involved children and young adults.

Participants had been screened for diabetes at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, with half confirmed to have the illness.

"We knew the test worked," Professor Wentworth said.

"The two things we didn't really know was how well and also the accuracy."

"The real art is calling something positive and negative ... and that gets tricky when there are borderline results because no test is 100 per cent accurate."

"We asked how well this test can discern those results when we know what the serum testing showed in traditional assays. We then compared the results."

He said the key was early diagnosis and prevention as there were often no symptoms in the beginnings of the disease, while early screening meant treatment could be given before irreversible damage occurred to the pancreas.

"Overwhelmingly, we found this blood spot test worked and was the preferred method of detection by the families involved," Professor Wentworth said. "It has the potential to decrease the cost of early diagnosis, increase the reach of screening programs and accelerate development and deployment of effective immunotherapies."

The test would be of particular benefit in regional and remote areas where it was more difficult to access testing, Professor Wentworth said.

"It's not quite as sensitive as the formal sample from a vein but importantly it is very specific, which means there won't be a lot of false positives," he said.

"No one before has shown you can have a system where you collect in-home and get an accurate result. We are world leaders in this technology."

The next step will be to work with the US company that has developed the test to do a bigger study next year.

"I expect this (test) will be FDA-approved by 2025 and then it should be simple to get it approved in Australia," Professor Wentworth said.

Long term the test is likely to be prescribed by doctors or through population screening.

Details on diabetes testing:
typescreen.org or
atic.svi.edu.au



Newport's Alice, 6, and Matilda, 9, volunteered for a world-first trial to help improve diabetes screening.
Picture: Brendan Beckett