



**Media Release - 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008**  
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## **World's First National Study of Multiple Sclerosis Prevalence**

In a report released today that has been jointly funded by the Multiple Sclerosis Society and the Health Research Council, New Zealand becomes the first to fully research the incidence of this neurological disease over an entire country.

Close to 3000 people have been clinically identified as people with MS with a further 1200 potentially with the condition, for which there is currently no known cure.

MS affects women at a rate three times that of men and is most often diagnosed in the late twenties to early thirties.

Whilst being most prevalent in people from a European background, the research has established that there are 61 Maori people with MS in New Zealand.

The prevalence is significantly related to regions of the country - increasing from 50.8 people per 100,000 in Northland to 134.6 people per 100,000 in Southland.

The research is a valuable tool to establish the resources required to support people with MS and their families and carers as well as being the foundation from which more clinical research can come.

Aspects of the results will be presented to the International MS Federation conference in Canada later this year.

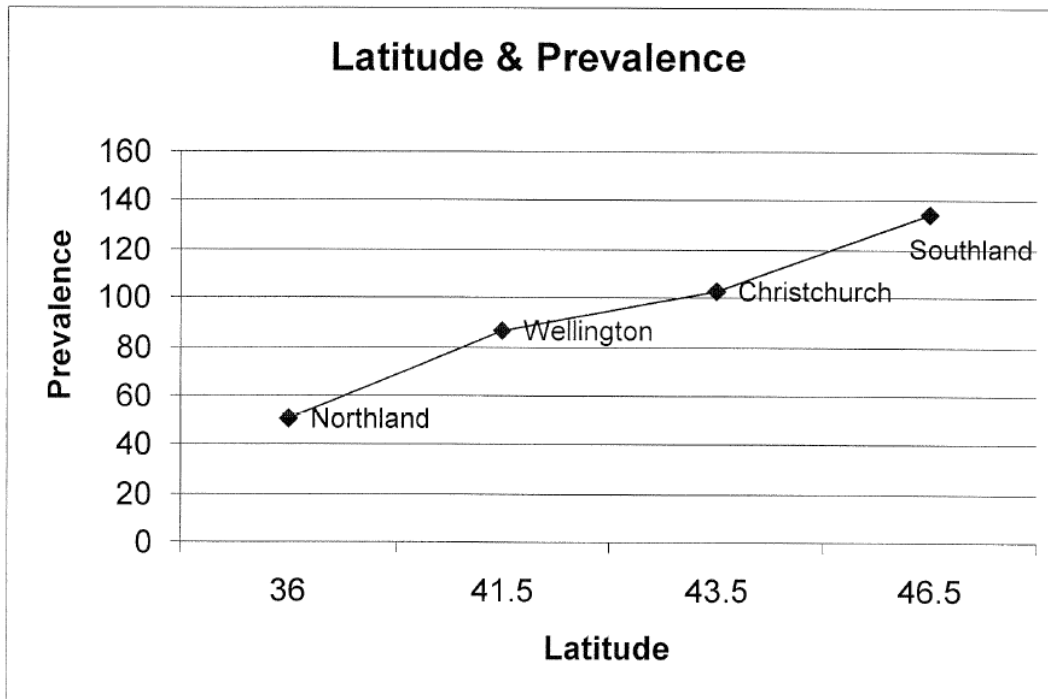
**Total number of Notifications and Confirmed cases of MS in New Zealand.**

- **Confirmed cases of MS - 2896**
- **This indicates a prevalence of 71.9 per 100,000**
- **There are potentially 1220 more possible cases**
- **61 of the 2896 confirmed cases were Maori**
- **For Maori the age-standardised prevalence (ASP) was 17.5 per 100,000**

<b>Region</b>	<b>People with MS</b>	<b>ASP – NZ population per 100,000</b>
Northland	82	50.8
Auckland	732	59
Waikato	177	46.4
Bay of Plenty	132	50
Gisbourne	20	46.7
Hawkes Bay	82	54.3
Taranaki	72	66.8
Manawatu-Wanganui	120	54
Wellington	383	86.2
Nelson-Tasman	75	77.7
Marlborough	42	86.8
Canterbury	557	103
West Coast	40	119.2
Otago	234	119.3
Southland	148	134.6

<b>People in NZ with MS</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>24.86%</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>2176</b>	<b>75.14%</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2896</b>	
<b>Maori people in NZ with MS</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0.66%</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>1.45%</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>2.11%</b>
<b>Pacific Island people in NZ with MS</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.03%</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.03%</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.07%</b>
<b>Prevalence of Multiple Sclerosis in New Zealand</b>		<b>72/100,000</b>	<b>0.07%</b>

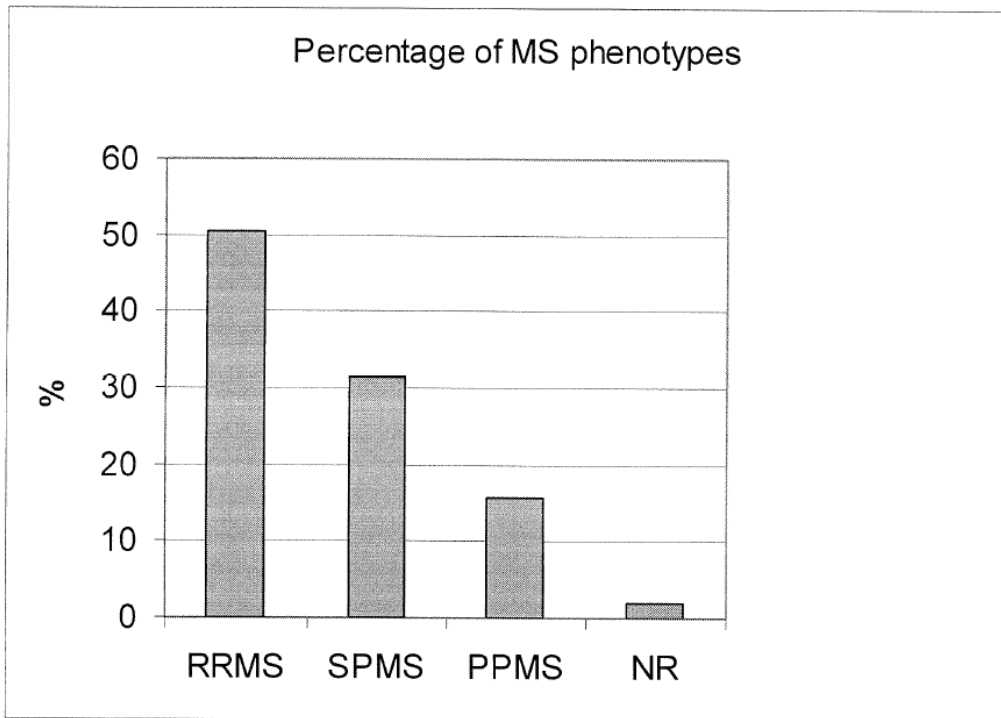
Therefore a clear North to South gradient of MS prevalence



Prevalence of MS by latitude.

A prevalence gradient of 3X was seen between Northland and Southland consistent with the estimated prevalence gradient from our grant proposal. This confirms a robust latitudinal gradient and therefore a significant environmental component in the development of MS in New Zealand

## Types of MS



RRMS = relapsing remitting MS, SPMS = secondary progressive MS and PPMS = primary progressive MS.

The percentages of the various types of MS were consistent with those published from other parts of the world.

### Level of disability.

Using the expanded disability status score where

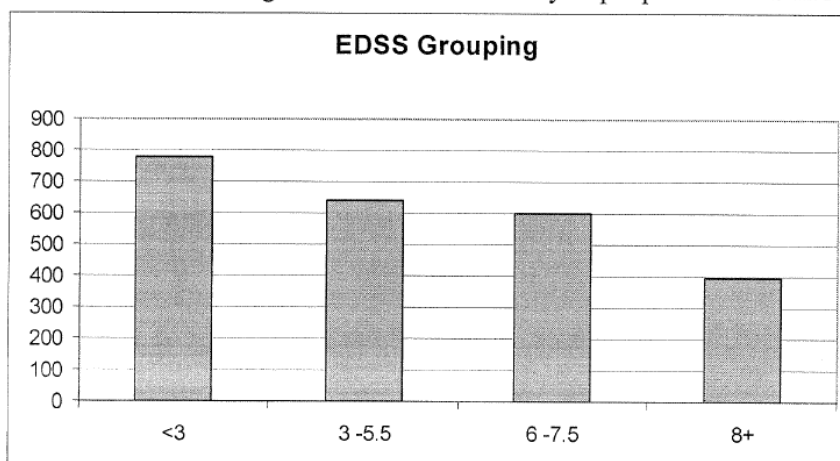
<3 = minimal disability

3 - <6 = mild to moderate disability (still able to walk independently)

>6 to 7.5 = moderate to severe disability.

>8 Severe disability confined to wheelchair or bed.

We found the following distribution of disability in people with MS in NZ



Of note there were 400 people in NZ confined to a wheelchair or bed from MS in 2006 and 1000 people who required at least some form of walking aid (walking stick to wheelchair)

## **Background Points**

- **MS is one of the most common debilitating neurological diseases in people in New Zealand**
- **MS is not preventable and there is, as yet, no cure**
- **The symptoms of MS usually appear and disappear unpredictably and they vary from person to person. Common symptoms include; weak or uncoordinated limbs, impaired balance, urinary dysfunction and vision problems – as well as fatigue**
- **There are around 2.5 million people worldwide and 3000 people in NZ with confirmed MS**
- **MS is an autoimmune disease where the body produces a misdirected immune system attack on the Central Nervous System**
- **The term Multiple Sclerosis refers to multiple areas of scarring (sclerosis) scattered throughout the brain and spinal cord**
- **The cause of MS is still not known. However, researchers are closer to finding the answer and think that both the genetic and environmental factors are important**
- **MS becomes more common the further away from the equator you are.**
- **MS symptoms usually appear in younger people between the ages of 20 and 50, with a peak in the early 30's.**
- **MS is more prevalent in Caucasians than in any other racial group. MS was previously rarely recorded in Maori, Polynesian people and Asian people, however, it is now becoming more common**
- **MS is not a hereditary disorder in the sense of being passed directly from parent to child. However, having a first-degree relative, (mother, father, sibling) with MS increases the chances of having it.**
- **MS is not contagious and most people with MS lead a fairly normal life, most of the time**