

# MUHC launches online genetic testing study

## CJN STAFF

The McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) has launched a study to evaluate the effectiveness of a new website offering free genetic information to Ashkenazi Jews about their increased risk of having children with life-threatening or fatal conditions.

Nine per cent of Ashkenazim are at risk of being carriers of a genetic disorder, the MUHC said. It is hoped that making this educational tool available will cut wait times for genetic testing in Montreal by allowing analysis of people's risk before they undergo that testing.

"The best time to be screened is prior to starting a family, but provincial wait times to see a genetic counsellor can be significant," said Guillaume Sillon, a genetic counsellor at the MUHC. "This new educative website will allow us to test the effectiveness of online, pre-test genetic

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learning within the Jewish community, helping individuals properly identify their risk and ultimately reduce the wait for genetic testing."

After completing the online assessment, those at risk will be sent an electronic requisition to undergo a blood test for genetic testing at the Montreal General Hospital.

Individuals of Ashkenazi Jewish descent may be screened for three genetic conditions: Tay-Sachs disease, Canavan disease and familial dysautonomia.

Most children with these genetic conditions are born to parents who did not know they were carriers and had no family history, the MUHC said.

If both parents are carriers of a mutation in the same gene, there's a 25 per cent chance of having an affected child, and a 75 per cent chance of having an unaffected child who can also be a carrier of the gene.

By being screened at an early stage, prospective parents will have the knowledge necessary to discuss their options, the MUHC believes.

"It is vital to know your risk factor when you are considering pregnancy so that you can weigh the possibilities," said Julie Kristof, chair of the Montreal Jewish Hereditary Disorder Fund ([www.TestJGD.com](http://www.TestJGD.com)) and a mother of two, whose daughter Miriam was diagnosed with familial dysautonomia.

"All people of Ashkenazi descent should be tested, even if your partner is not Ashkenazi. Otherwise, it is our children who may suffer. [Our daughter's] condition has fundamentally altered every aspect of our lives, both professionally and personally.

"I hope that this project can help save other families some of that grief."

For more information or to sign up for the study and carrier testing, contact Sillon at 514-934-1934, ext. 43707, or [guillaume.sillon@muhc.mcgill.ca](mailto:guillaume.sillon@muhc.mcgill.ca).

To find out more about the Montreal Jewish Hereditary Disorder Fund, contact Kristof at 514-260-4998 or 514-483-5500, or [info@TestJGD.com](mailto:info@TestJGD.com). ■



## Israeli filmmakers

Seven Israeli films, including five entries from Tel Aviv University in the student competition, were screened during the Montreal World Film Festival, which concluded Sept. 1.

Filmmakers who were in town were received at the Israeli consulate by interim consul general Tali Samash, seated centre, and consul Avi Lev-Louis, standing left.

With them in the front row are Shira Porat, left, and Na'ama Keha, and, in the back, Hadas Ayalon, Yakie Ayalon and his wife, and Amos Geva.



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