

# RURAL Study Begins Outreach and Community Engagement in North Mississippi

KAREN BASCOM, SCIENCE WRITER, UMMC

In May 2019 researchers from the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) and partner institutions announced the Risk Underlying Rural Areas Longitudinal Study, or RURAL, which will examine the causes of high-burden of heart, lung, blood, and sleep (HLBS) disorders in the Southern Appalachia and Mississippi Delta regions.

With funding from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and led by Boston University, the six-year, \$21.4 million multisite prospective cohort study plans to recruit 4,000 participants from 10 of the most economically-challenged rural counties in those areas.

"We are going to look at a rural population cohort—a cohort that has never been studied successfully at this scale," said Dr. Ervin Fox, professor of medicine and principal investigator for the Mississippi sites. Additional RURAL investigators in Mississippi include Dr. Frances Henderson, consultant; Dr. Felicia Caples, project administrator; Dr. Sonja Fuqua, consultant; and Abril Grant, research specialist.

The RURAL study plan is to use a mobile examination unit and wearable activity monitors and smartphones to assess familial, lifestyle, behavior, and medical histories. In addition to considering environmental and economic factors, standard and novel risk factors for HLBS disorders will also be studied.

Recruiting the Mississippi cohort for the RURAL study is planned from Oktibbeha and Panola counties. A mobile exam unit will visit each county and serve as the site where RURAL investigators will conduct the participant exams.

"We hope to recruit people from Como, Crenshaw, Courtland, Sardis, Pope, Maben, Sturgis, and throughout all Panola and Oktibbeha counties. We want this study to be representative of these communities," Dr. Fox said.



Ervin R. Fox, MD



Frances Henderson  
Consultant



Sonja Fuqua  
Consultant



Felicia Caples  
Project Administrator



Abril Grant  
Research Specialist

"There are critical gaps in knowledge on why those living in rural areas are at highest risk for death due to heart disease and stroke. This problem is true for both blacks and whites living in these regions."

*"The RURAL study is poised to find the distribution and determinants of HLBS disorders in a multiethnic population living in rural areas, to determine how different risk factors contribute to disease in this population, and what risk factors are specific to those living in these communities," — Ervin Fox, MD explained.*

"Additionally, the study will look at resilience and identify solutions by understanding the differences in higher risk and lower risk counties. These solutions can then be used to implement helpful community-based interventions. Finally, there is a strong community engagement

component to the study, allowing for educational and health-related activities throughout the span of the study," Dr. Fox said.

The Mississippi Core Team for the RURAL study has engaged the community through focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and the formation of a community advisory board for each county. The board members will serve as liaisons between the RURAL study and the community.

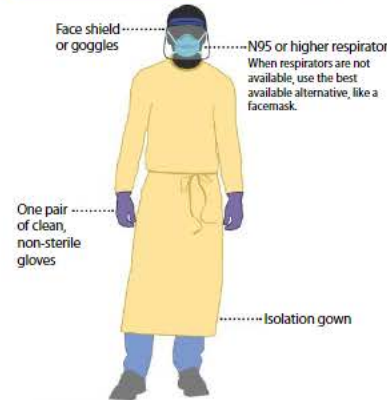
In addition, the RURAL study and community advisory boards co-hosted Go Red for Women heart health events in Panola and Oktibbeha counties in February, which introduced attendees to RURAL and its goals.

The community advisory boards and the Mississippi Core of RURAL will continue participating in health education events, connecting with community partners and businesses, and working with faith-based organizations and health care facilities to promote the study. There will be periodic public announcements regarding the RURAL study. The study plans to start recruitment and expects the arrival of the mobile exam unit to Oktibbeha and Panola counties in 2021.

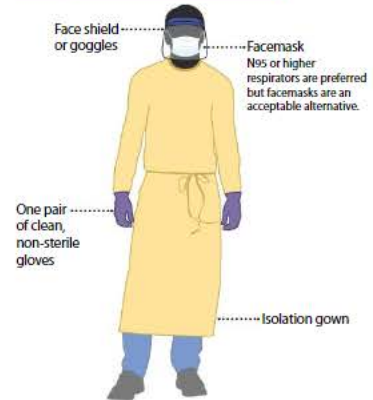
For more detailed information, physicians should contact Dr. Ervin Fox at UMMC at [efox@ummc.edu](mailto:efox@ummc.edu) or by phone at (601) 984-1000.

## COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Healthcare Personnel

**Preferred PPE – Use N95 or Higher Respirator**



**Acceptable Alternative PPE – Use Facemask**



10/28/20 010738

[cdc.gov/COVID19](https://cdc.gov/COVID19)