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## Bacteria all in the delivery

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 HEALTH REPORTER

BABIES born naturally have different gut bacteria than those delivered by caesarean, new research has found.

In the largest study into newborn microbiota, Australian researchers found that babies born vaginally get most of their gut bacteria from their mum's gut – not the birth canal.

C-section infants, however, carry more bacteria commonly found in a hospital environment, including those with antimicrobial resistance.

Lead researcher Dr Samuel Forster from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research, said that they were now preparing to recruit 20,000 babies to further look at the ideal make-up of gut bacteria, and see if this initial difference in the newborn period affected long-term health.

If so, it paves the way for treatment in the first few days of life to correct the bacterial mix.

This collection of trillions of microorganisms in the gut are becoming implicated in the development of every-

thing from obesity and diabetes, to allergic and autoimmune diseases.

“At this stage, we know that there are striking differences between the two groups. But it may well be that there are benefits of both bacterial communities,” Dr Forster said.

“We use probiotics already. If we knew the right window and what we should be putting in, then we could help the baby develop the optimal immune system,” he said.

The Hudson Institute and Wellcome Sanger Institute, studied gut bacteria from 600 UK babies over the first 21 days of life via stool samples. They were tested again at eight months of age.

While the mix of bacteria was similar when the children reached infancy, there were clear differences in that first month after birth between the two delivery methods.

The findings are published in the prestigious journal *Nature*. “We know babies are sterile at birth, so whatever bacteria gets in first is going to colonise and what you see first may actually matter,” Dr Forster said. “That’s what we want to find out.”