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Video Games: Medicine For The Body

The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) will present the newest prototype of its educational game Immune Attack on Friday, 29 September 2006, at 10:00 a.m. at "The Body is a Game," part of the Games for Health Conference at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore.

Immune Attack (<http://www.fas.org/immuneattack/>) is a new generation video game that engages students and teaches complex biology and immunology topics in a manner different from the traditional classroom approach. The goal is to immerse the student in immunology concepts to make learning fun and exciting.

"Immunology is a complicated and difficult subject to learn, which is precisely why it makes such an interesting basis for a video game," said Eitan Glinert, FAS Project Coordinator of Immune Attack. "The challenges in Immune Attack give those who might not otherwise be interested in biology the chance to learn in a fun, hands-on manner they won't find in a text book."

Human body tissue structures serve as the playing field in this first person strategy game where immune cells face off against bacterial and viral infections. A teenaged prodigy with a unique immunodeficiency must teach his immune system how to function properly, or die trying. Using a nanobot and aided by a helpful professor, the teenager explores biologically accurate and visually detailed settings in pursuit of this goal.

"The video game experience is a wonderful complement to the learning that happens in the classroom. The game allowed students to use sights, sounds, and touch to get better acquainted with the immune system. Students also interacted with each other, having problem-solving discussions to enhance their game-play, and ultimately learning of the subject," said Angelique Bosse, a teacher at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, MD.

Each subsequent level of Immune Attack features a different infection with a new type of immune cell for the player to train. The player zooms among red blood cells, squeezes through blood vessel walls, and scans and interacts with various objects to train his immune system to fight off the invading pathogens.

"Clearly, computer games hold special interest to a



Track down infections and train your own immune system to overcome disease. (Screenshot from Immune Attack, courtesy of Federation of American Scientists)

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generation who has grown up with them, and as such, they show promise as educational tools. Our educational games program is undertaking research to better understand what features of games can be used to improve learning and to develop guidelines based on that research," said Kay Howell, Vice President of Information Technologies at FAS.

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As video games have become a common part of society, FAS is looking for ways to produce complex games that provide an environment for learning about history, problem-solving, and managing systems. Games and 3-D interactive simulations will one day revolutionize education and how people learn. FAS educational games help students and workers learn globally competitive skills in demand by employers.

"Games increase motivation, but it is not entirely clear why. For example, games typically include competition - either against a human opponent or a computer-generated one. They are often story-based, feature strong characters, and typically 'keep score.' The research challenge is to determine how these features contribute to learning," said Howell.

Immune Attack is an educational video game jointly developed by FAS, Brown University and the University of Southern California.

Games for Health is a project produced by The Serious Games Initiative, a Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars effort that applies cutting edge games and game technologies to a range of public and private policy, leadership, and management issues. The Initiative founded Games for Health to develop a community and best practices platform for the numerous games being built for health care applications.

The Federation of American Scientists (<http://www.fas.org>) was formed in 1945 by atomic scientists from the Manhattan Project. Endorsed by 68 Nobel Laureates in biology, chemistry, economics, medicine and physics as sponsors, the Federation has addressed a broad spectrum of national security issues in carrying out its mission to promote humanitarian uses of science and technology. Today, the FAS Information Technologies Project works on strategies to harness the potential of emerging technologies to improve how we teach and learn.

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