

# NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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## Hepatitis A prevalence study launched

**Vancouver, B.C.** – Doctors at the B.C. Research Institute for Children's & Women's Health and the University of British Columbia are launching a province-wide study, the first of its kind in Canada, to help formulate better health strategies to reduce Hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection rates in B.C.

"Hepatitis A is the most common cause of viral liver disease, yet we don't know the actual infection rate in B.C.," said Dr. David Scheifele, Director of the Vaccine Evaluation Centre at BC Children's Hospital. "This study will tell us the prevalence of HAV in people five to 49 years in age, allowing us to model different prevention strategies," said Scheifele.

"The data we collect from this study will help us determine the true burden of Hepatitis A infections, and also allow us to determine which population subsets will benefit the most from newly available Hepatitis A vaccines," said Dr. Jan Ochnio, Director of UBC's Vaccine Evaluation Centre Laboratory.

Ipsos-Reid will make random phone calls to identify potential participants until sufficient volunteers are identified throughout the province. Those who agree to participate, or have their children participate, will receive saliva collection kits that detect HAV-specific antibody as well as a brief questionnaire to assess potential risk factors for acquiring HAV.

A total of 1,400 kits will be sent. The research team hopes to obtain at least 200 samples from each of seven age groups of participants. Collection and analysis of the samples and modeling of prevention strategies is expected to take six months.

A pilot study for the mail-based collection of saliva samples that was conducted in the spring of 2003 confirmed that a province-wide, mail-based approach would provide appropriate and sufficient samples for modeling and study purposes.

BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. For more information please visit [www.cw.bc.ca](http://www.cw.bc.ca).

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information please visit [www.phsa.ca](http://www.phsa.ca).

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**Note to editors:** Dr. Scheifele and Dr. Ochnio are available for interviews Wednesday, Jan. 19, and Thursday, Jan. 20.

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