



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 22, 2004

BC Children's Hospital launches VIRAP New rapid test to diagnose influenza, RSV and other respiratory viruses

Vancouver – BC Children's Hospital has developed a new rapid testing process called VIRAP (viral respiratory rapid testing centre) to obtain a same-day diagnosis of viral respiratory illness, helping emergency room and community-based physicians determine how best to manage patients.

"We learned from the patient surge related to SARS just how important it is to have the ability to quickly sort out those patients with a serious respiratory infection from those that have a milder illness," said Dr. Eva Thomas, director of the microbiology lab at Children's.

VIRAP can quickly identify viral infections such as influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), and parainfluenza, confirming that an infection is caused by something other than SARS. Another benefit is being able to distinguish between viral and bacterial infections.

"At this time of year we see a lot of children with respiratory illnesses such as RSV," said Thomas. "While the symptoms of a viral infection and a bacterial infection can look the same, how they are treated is fundamentally different. In some cases antibiotics are the solution; with viruses that is not the case. The over-prescription of antibiotics is not only a serious health issue; it's also an unnecessary cost to the health care system."

Key elements of VIRAP are a quick turnaround of specimens and the development of a routine specimen kit. Lab hours at Children's have been extended to ensure samples are tested the same day they are received. Kits with specimen collection instructions are now available to doctors in Vancouver by calling Children's Hospital at 604-875-2345 and asking for Infection Control. Plans are underway to make kits available to physicians throughout B.C.

– more –

VIRAP data will also be used to better our understanding of viral diseases. The BC Centre for Disease Control will incorporate VIRAP data to monitor emerging disease patterns and also examine those VIRAP samples that indicate a potentially new viral strain.

VIRAP was developed by BC Children's Hospital in collaboration with the BC Centre for Disease Control and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's Vancouver General Hospital and Providence Health Care. This group will also work together to further develop the VIRAP program.

BC Children's Hospital and the BC Centre for Disease Control are agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

Note to media:

BC Children's Hospital's Dr. Eva Thomas will be available to the media for interviews.

Media Contact:
Public Affairs & Communications
BC Children's Hospital
(604) 875-2301