Public Health Advisory

HTLV-1 seroprevalence study now underway

IQALUIT, Nunavut (May 2, 2006) –The Department of Health and Social Services has initiated a study to determine the prevalence of the Human T-Cell Lymphotropic Virus, Type 1 (HTLV-1). This anonymous, unlinked seroprevalence study is designed to collect more information about the presence of this virus in Nunavut.

The study is being done in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada and with the approval of the Health Canada Ethics Review Board. It is expected to last between six to twelve months. Results will be used to determine the next step(s) to take to safeguard the health of Nunavummiut.

The study is anonymous. Results will not identify any individuals, and so no individual reports will be available as a result of this study. If people want to know their HTLV-1 status, they can ask for a free, confidential blood test from their health centre or public health unit.

The seroprevalence study was first announced in September by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Isaac Sobol. Planning has been underway for this study since that time. The department is also:

- Offering confidential, free testing to persons at risk or persons who feel they might be at risk for contracting HTLV-1,
- Offering confidential testing to pregnant women as part of the prenatal screening program,
- Promoting behaviours that reduce the risk of transmitting HTLV-1, such as safe sex.

The department has published a series of Fact Sheets about HTLV-1. These are available from community health centres, public health, and on-line at *www.gov.nu.ca/hsssite/htlv1.shtml*.

HTLV-1 infects the blood. It can cause cancer of the blood and diseases of the nervous system. HTLV-1 is spread from a person who has the virus to another by sexual contact, sharing needles, or through breastfeeding.

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