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News Release

For Immediate Release

Wastewater monitoring: research aims to enhance TB prevention and detection in Nunavut

Iqaluit, Nunavut (January 16, 2024) – A groundbreaking research study is being launched in Iqaluit to explore wastewater monitoring as a tool to detect and prevent the spread of tuberculosis (TB) in Nunavut.

The five-year research study aims to develop and optimize TB wastewater monitoring in the City of Iqaluit to determine if earlier detection of TB bacteria in wastewater can allow for earlier public health interventions to treat the disease and reduce transmission.

This study builds upon the current TB program in Nunavut, complementing the effectiveness of TB diagnostic methods such as skin tests, sputum tests, and chest X-rays. While these methods continue to successfully identify TB, the new study aims to establish another layer of early detection to these existing strategies.

The study is led by researchers from The Ottawa Hospital, the University of Ottawa, the University of British Columbia and partners from Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), under the guidance of the Taima TB Steering Committee. Taima TB was founded in 2011 by The Ottawa Hospital's Research Institute, NTI and the Government of Nunavut's (GN) Department of Health to conduct research to improve the prevention, detection and treatment of TB in Nunavut.

The study is funded through a \$3 million grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), as well as \$500,000 from NTI. The collaboration between the founding partners, as well as the University of Ottawa, City of Iqaluit and the Uquutaq Society, is critical to the success of this study.

The Taima TB research team will be hosting public events in Iqaluit from January 16 to 18, 2024. Be sure to follow the Government of Nunavut and partners' social media pages for details.

For more detailed information on TB, ongoing research efforts, and the Taima TB initiative, please visit <https://taimatb.tunngavik.com>.

Quotes:

“If we can reliably monitor TB levels in wastewater in Nunavut, it could help us target our screening efforts to where they are most needed. Wastewater monitoring could play an important role in helping us eliminate TB from Nunavut, and this research gets us closer to that goal.”

Dr. Gonzalo Alvarez
Lead researcher for Taima TB
TB consultant for the Government of Nunavut
Physician and scientist at The Ottawa Hospital
Associate professor at the University of Ottawa

“With the disproportionate rate of TB found among Inuit, it is crucial to employ every tool we can to stop the spread and eliminate TB in Nunavut. NTI, in partnership with the GN’s Department of Health, successfully completed a community-wide screening for TB in Pangnirtung this past fall. Initiatives such as this will continue to be necessary, however, if we can find more streamlined and efficient ways to detect TB in Nunavut communities, we can be better prepared for future outbreaks, bringing us that much closer to eradicating TB in Inuit populations.”

Aluki Kotierk
President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

“This study is a significant step towards our proactive and robust health strategies, demonstrating our commitment to safeguarding the health of Nunavummiut. We anticipate that the outcomes of this research will lead to additional layers of TB interventions and advance our progress towards eliminating TB in Nunavut.”

The Honourable John Main, Minister of Health
Government of Nunavut

“Tuberculosis is one of the biggest health problems facing Inuit throughout Nunavut. If you live in Nunavut, you are more likely to catch TB. This study could turn out to be an important way for us to monitor TB spread; and the City of Iqaluit is happy to be one of the partners in this wastewater monitoring project.”

Soloman Awa
Mayor of Iqaluit

“We hope to apply the successes of respiratory virus wastewater surveillance around the world to TB, and specifically to TB wastewater surveillance in Nunavut. It is our hope that we will develop the science necessary for Iqaluit’s wastewaters to tell us when TB has the potential to start spreading in the community so that it can be stopped.”

*Dr. Robert Delatolla & Dr. Jim Sun
The University of Ottawa, the University of British Columbia*

“CIHR supported the start of Taima TB in 2011, and we’re happy to fund this new wastewater study. After so much success identifying the COVID-19 virus in wastewater, the Taima TB research team is using the same method to track TB. This is a great step towards eliminating TB in the Inuit homeland.”

*Catherine Macleod
Acting President, Canadian Institutes of Health Research*

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