

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**Friday, June 5, 2009**

### **BC researchers to lead rapid vaccine clinical trials and data management for new national influenza research network**

#### ***\$10.8-million network will test pandemic vaccine for safety and effectiveness***

**(Vancouver – June 5, 2009)** – Investigators at the Child & Family Research Institute (CFRI) at BC Children’s Hospital will lead rapid vaccine trials to determine the safety, effectiveness, and dosing schedule for a pandemic vaccine and lead the data management for a new \$10.8-million national Influenza Research Network announced today by the federal Minister of Health Leona Aglukkaq. Approximately \$1.5-million of that funding will support the work led by CFRI researchers. The Network is a partnership between the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Dr. Scott Halperin at Dalhousie University in Halifax is the Network’s principal investigator. Other Network projects will focus on how best to deliver mass vaccinations (led from Edmonton), measurement of vaccine uptake (led from Toronto) and effectiveness against severe infection (led from Halifax) and detailed vaccine safety assessments (led from Quebec).

CFRI's Dr. David Scheifele will lead the Network’s rapid vaccine trials, which will involve ten Canadian centres. Following approval and release of a pandemic flu vaccine, the rapid trials team will quickly provide observations to Health Canada on the immune response to vaccination across the age spectrum and in special populations by measuring the rate and amount of antibodies formed in response to the vaccine. The team will also measure and report side effects along with ongoing surveillance of vaccine safety.

“We will use the seasonal flu vaccine this fall to test all the steps required for evaluating a pandemic vaccine,” says Dr. Scheifele, who heads the Vaccine Evaluation Centre at CFRI. “It’s a great rehearsal opportunity for us to ensure that all our clinical trial sites are ready and that our data management works.”

“Our plan is to get access to the seasonal flu vaccine within days of its availability from industry, administer it to 900 volunteers across Canada within a week, and have the safety and immune response data in hand before most flu shot programs begin in October,” says Dr. Scheifele. He is the Canadian Institutes of Health Research/Wyeth Chair in Clinical Vaccine Research and Professor of Pediatrics at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Rapidly completing a national vaccine trial is no easy feat. Fortunately, volunteers are already available to participate in clinical trials. For years, Dr. Scheifele’s team has

administered the seasonal flu vaccine to staff at BC Children's Hospital, Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, and BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority. Many of these staff have agreed to consider participating in future clinical trials.

"We have 20 years experience and we've assembled a team of Canada's best vaccine researchers from ten centres across the country," says Dr. Scheifele. "We've done more than 150 clinical trials. We're up to the task of evaluating a pandemic vaccine and the public will be well served by our efforts."

"Canada is fortunate to have a number of expert vaccine trial centres working together on an initiative of national and global importance," says Dr. Monika Naus, Director of Immunization at the BC Centre for Disease Control (an agency of Provincial Health Services Authority) and past Chair of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. "As the recent emergence and rapid spread of novel H1N1 human swine influenza has shown us, a threat in one country can impact the entire world. This initiative demonstrates Canada and BC's key role in pandemic preparedness."

Leading the Network's data management is Dr. Jean-Paul Collet, CFRI Scientist and Director of Partnerships, and Director of Research for the UBC Department of Pediatrics. The Network will use a web-based application called Dacima Software Inc. that allows real-time data analysis and reporting.

CFRI is currently building new lab space for the Vaccine Evaluation Centre along with a new clinical research unit on the campus of BC Children's Hospital. Located in CFRI's new building, both areas will be completed in fall 2009. The new lab space is funded by BC Children's Hospital Foundation, Canada Foundation for Innovation, the British Columbia Knowledge Development Fund, and the Child & Family Research Institute.

Established twenty years ago as Canada's first academic vaccine centre, the Vaccine Evaluation Centre at CFRI is supported by the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research. The Centre's researchers are all involved in the new Network.

CFRI conducts discovery, clinical and applied research to benefit the health of children and families. It is the largest institute of its kind in Western Canada. CFRI works in close partnership with the University of British Columbia, BC Children's Hospital and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority, and BC Children's Hospital Foundation. CFRI has additional important relationships with BC's five regional health authorities and with BC academic institutions Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, the University of Northern British Columbia, and the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

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