

For Immediate Release | July 31, 2020

## Medical equipment in long-term care homes under the microscope in COVID-19 contamination study

Vancouver, BC – Medical equipment, such as blood pressure cuffs, have been identified as surfaces at risk of COVID-19 contamination in long-term care homes, according to a Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH)-led study.

Vancouver Coastal Health took immediate action when the preliminary findings came to light. Shared blood pressure cuffs and other medical equipment at the sites were replaced with either disposable cuffs or dedicated equipment that is not shared between patients.

Vancouver Coastal Health collected samples at three long-term care homes during outbreaks of COVID-19 to better understand the extent to which environmental contamination occurs in long-term care settings. Eighty nine surfaces were swabbed, including entrances, kitchens, staff communal areas, nursing stations and care areas. Six of the 89 samples tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for COVID-19.

In all three facilities, the virus was detected on standard reusable blood pressure cuffs, for a total of four contaminated blood pressure cuffs of nine that were tested. The virus was also detected on the handle of a mobile linen cart and on the touch display of an electronic tablet used for electronic medication records.

“This study was done in sites with known outbreaks where enhanced cleaning was already in place, so we would hope that the virus would not be present on medical equipment that is moved from room to room,” said lead author Dr. Atiba Nelson, a Public Health and Preventive Medicine resident physician who led the environmental swabbing with a VCH team. “Although more research is needed to determine if this kind of contamination could contribute to transmission of the virus, it did highlight areas of concern.”

While person-to-person transmission is believed to be the primary driver of outbreaks in long-term care facilities, the findings, published this month in the [American Journal of Infection Control](#), suggest medical equipment is a potential route for transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The authors of the paper recommend enhanced environmental cleaning for all medical equipment or prohibiting communal use of the equipment.

“The findings of the study have informed our response to long-term care outbreaks and highlight the need to be vigilant against COVID-19,” said VCH Medical Health Officer, Dr. Michael Schwandt, the co-author of the article. “Doing this type of research doesn’t just help us manage outbreaks now, it adds to

the science on COVID-19 transmission so VCH and other health authorities have a better understanding of this new virus and so we can respond more effectively in the future.”

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is responsible for the delivery of \$3.6 billion in community, hospital and long-term care to more than one million people in communities including Richmond, Vancouver, the North Shore, Sunshine Coast, Sea to Sky corridor, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola. VCH also provides specialized care and services for people throughout B.C.

###

**CONTACT:**

**Matt Kieltyka**

Public Affairs Specialist

Vancouver Coastal Health

Cell: 604-833-4541

Email: [matt.kieltyka@vch.ca](mailto:matt.kieltyka@vch.ca)