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## INFORMATION BULLETIN

October 18, 2005

### **PNEUMOCOCCUS BELIEVED TO BE CAUSE OF DEATHS AT LUTHER COURT**

Preliminary test results have shown that the deaths of four elderly residents of the Luther Court long-term care facility were a result of pneumococcal pneumonia, the B.C. Coroners Service announced today.

The pneumococcus (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*) is the most common identified cause of bacterial pneumonia. Elderly persons and those with certain chronic medical conditions are particularly susceptible.

The Coroners Service became involved on October 12, 2005 when three patients from the same ward at Luther Court died within a span of five hours. A fourth patient who was taken to hospital that night died on October 15. The Service has been working with microbiologists and public health experts to determine the cause of the deaths and what preventative measures can be taken to try to avoid further adverse events.

Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended to prevent pneumococcal infections in susceptible individuals. The vaccine is effective for the strains that cause about 85 to 90 per cent of serious pneumococcal infections. All persons over the age of 65 years or with chronic health problems are encouraged to obtain this vaccine, as well as the vaccine for influenza.

Good handwashing practices are recommended to reduce transmission. As well, anyone with a respiratory infection should avoid contact with others, particularly the frail and elderly, as viral or influenza infections can lead to the development of serious secondary pneumococcal pneumonias in those persons.

For further information, please contact:

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