

Thursday, 23 December 2021

## BACKING WORLD-LEADING RESEARCH INTO COVID-19 TREATMENTS

The Andrews Labor Government is backing Victorian research into new coronavirus treatment, including a nasal spray medication that envelops the virus and reduces household transmission.

Acting Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Mary-Anne Thomas today announced \$13.3 million in grants for seven research projects examining a range of coronavirus treatment options.

University of Melbourne and Monash University have received \$4.2 million to establish a six-month clinical trial, developed in collaboration with Oxford University, of a heparin-based nasal spray to be used in households where a person has coronavirus.

The second most widely used drug in the world and primarily prescribed as a blood-thinner to treat or prevent blood clots, heparin forms the base of the nasal spray treatment which is already being hailed as a success for its easy administration, stability at room temperature and global availability.

The IntraNasal HEpaRin Trial (INHERIT) will be led by the Northern Hospital, using the Covid (Oximetry) Monitoring and Early Treatment (COMET) platform that has enabled researchers to access and treat patients within 24 hours of their diagnosis, speeding up treatment and providing remote patient monitoring through portable oximeter devices that measure oxygen levels in blood.

Other research projects receiving funding include \$2 million for a Walter and Eliza Hall Institute trial of antiviral cocktails for immunocompromised patients unable to receive coronavirus vaccines, and \$1.8 million for a Burnet Institute study on a suite of biological medications that could neutralise and kill virus-infected cells. For the full list, go to [djpr.vic.gov.au/medical-research/initiatives/covid-19-research](https://djpr.vic.gov.au/medical-research/initiatives/covid-19-research).

In the past year, the Labor Government has invested more than \$590 million in medical research – including up to \$400 million for a new Australian Institute of Infectious Disease to lead the fight against future pandemics. Clinical trials held in Victoria contribute more than \$300 million annually to the state's economy.

Last week, Victorian scientists and manufacturers reached a major milestone, unveiling Australia's first mRNA COVID-19 vaccine candidate after a research period of just five months. Clinical trials will commence in early 2022.

### **Quote attributable to Acting Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Mary-Anne Thomas**

*"Coronavirus is not going away any time soon and our amazing researchers are doing work that stands to make a real difference. These projects will benefit not just Victorians but people around the world."*

### **Quote attributable to Director of Lung Health Research Centre University of Melbourne Professor Gary Anderson**

*"Our study shows immense potential – studies show that intranasal heparin can wrap around the virus like a python, preventing it from infecting you or spreading the virus to others."*

### **Quote attributable to Director of Medicines Manufacturing Innovation Centre Monash University Professor Michelle McIntosh**

*"The team has done everything possible in the laboratory to suggest this treatment will be effective, but the only way to answer the question is with a robust clinical trial."*

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