

Important **cancer** study seeks Valley volunteers

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Nancy Burbidge of Canard thinks being a volunteer in a long-term **cancer** study is a good way to contribute.

She hopes other Kings County residents will get involved in Atlantic PATH, part of a nation-wide longitudinal look at factors that may cause **cancer**.

Researchers aim is to involve 30,000 people in the Atlantic Provinces alone. So far, only 2,000 individuals in Nova Scotia – mostly from the Metro Halifax area- have been recruited.

“There likely aren’t any direct benefits for oneself, just for our children and the coming generations. They have been randomly selecting people under age 69, but are looking for lots of others to volunteer,” said Burbidge.

Individuals between 35 and 69 are asked questions about lifestyle, health and diet. They provide blood, urine, saliva and toenail samples and various physical measurements.

“After filling out a long form at home, it took just over an hour at the office at the Halifax Shopping Centre,” Burbidge said. “Going through the consent process, giving samples, measurements, and an interesting test for bone density.”

Largest study of its kind

Atlantic PATH is the largest **cancer** research project ever undertaken in the region. With biological samples, lifestyle information and physical measurements from male and female volunteers, this landmark study examines how genetics, environment and lifestyle contribute to the development of **cancer**.

“The information obtained through this study will provide an enormous bank of information which researchers will be able to draw upon to help identify the causes of **cancer** and, in turn, develop better detection, treatment and prevention methods,” says principal investigator Dr. Louise Parker.

Cancer takes a long time to develop, Parker said. By analyzing the samples and other information over a long period, researchers may be able to determine why some people develop particular **cancers** while others do not.

Parker is hopeful that some Valley residents will carpool into the city in order to participate.

Lifestyle factors

Obesity is large part of the study, Parker noted. “We have the highest rates of obesity in Canada in Nova Scotia. One in five or one in six will develop **cancer**”

Lifestyle issues are central to the **cancer** battle, she added. Smoking, obesity, activity levels and diet can overwhelm any other health risk.

“If we got all those things right, we could slash **cancer** rates,” she believes. “This should interest everybody; it’s really, really important for Nova Scotia.”

Atlantic PATH will track participants’ health for 30 years through **cancer** registries, hospital records and other health-related databases.

The Atlantic PATH is part of a \$42-million national study known as the Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project, funded by the Canadian Partnership Against **Cancer**. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec are also participating in the national study.

For more information, see <http://www.atlanticpath.ca> or contact volunteer@atlanticpath.ca

Arsenic in your toenails?

Dr. Louise Parker said studies from other countries have shown arsenic at high levels in water is associated with **cancer** in the community, especially bladder and kidney **cancers**.

Both tasteless and odourless, arsenic occurs naturally in some rock types and can leach into drinking water through drilled or dug wells

Parker says this region has the highest **cancer** rates in Canada. Her research will



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focus on identifying to what extent well water contaminated by arsenic is contributing to high rates of bladder and kidney **cancer** in the region.

Researchers in Halifax will use the toenail clippings of Nova Scotians to study **cancer** risks associated with exposure to arsenic in drinking water. The goal is to learn whether areas with high levels of **cancer** are also areas where people have the highest levels of arsenic in their bodies.

The three-year, \$575,000 study is among 71 new research projects funded by grants from the **Canadian Cancer** Society.

According to Parker, 45 per cent of Nova Scotia households rely on well water, though it is unclear how many residents have contaminated water supplies or how much arsenic they are being exposed to.

Participation will save families the \$100 cost of a water test, Parker noted.



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