

## Study finds the monitoring of toilet surfaces could impact public health surveillance

30 June 2017

Surface swabbing of toilets and bathrooms could strengthen disease surveillance according to recent research from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) published in the journal *PeerJ*.

The paper, *Primary health clinic toilet/bathroom surface swab sampling can indicate community profile of sexually transmitted infections* (STIs) reports significant correlations between surface swabs and STI notifications data in the Northern Territory (NT).

Menzies researcher and lead author, Associate Professor Phil Giffard, said the study demonstrated that swab sampling can provide valuable information that is complementary to notifications data, while also having the potential to provide information for areas where there is no effective system of notification.

“In the NT, STIs are notifiable. This enabled us to match our data from toilet and bathroom surface swab sampling from urban and rural communities in the NT with the notification data from corresponding population areas to test for correlations.

“Further application of the findings may be in situations other than primary health clinics where we tested, such as travel hubs and entertainment precincts and for targets other than STIs such as antibiotic resistance genes or exotic viruses,” Assoc Prof Giffard said.

In addition, the swabbing system had a number of benefits which would contribute to the ease of take up for public health surveillance purposes.

“Swab sampling is a low cost, non-intrusive method of testing public areas,” Assoc Prof Giffard said.

The study was funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The full paper is available at <https://peerj.com/articles/3487/>

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### Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia’s leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.