2026 Infection Research Newsletter

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2026!

It's hard to believe we're already halfway through the year. Our program members have made an impressive start, achieving some fantastic milestones along the way. Read on to see what they've been up to so far in 2026.

PROGRAM LEAD UPDATES -

Welcome to Dr Gabrielle Briggs, who has joined the Infection Research Program as Deputy Lead of the Severe Bacterial Infection theme. Dr Briggs is the lead scientist working with the Trauma Service at John Hunter Hospital and manages the Surgical Sciences Laboratory. Her research revolves around the complications and pathophysiology of severely injured patients, including coagulopathy, traumatic brain injury, sepsis, bone and joint infections, blood transfusions and tissue regeneration.

GRANTS AND AWARDS -


Congratulations to our seed grant recipients, Dr Sarah Browning (left) and Dr Camille Esneau (right), who were awarded Program funds to support their following pilot projects.

- Dr Browning: Sink Grate–Mediated Environmental Contamination During Tap Use and the Effect of Foamed Disinfection: A Pilot Experimental Study (NSYNC Program)
- Dr Esneau: Defining Community Rhinovirus Diversity and Generating Clinical Isolates from the PREVENT Cohort

IN THE NEWS -

Prof Nathan Bartlett featured in the Newcastle Herald[1] recently for his work on the development of a nasal spray that could stop respiratory viruses before they take hold. The treatment, INNA-051, has progressed to Phase 2 clinical trials in the United States.

Read all about it here[2]

Major news for the SNAP (Staphylococcus aureus Network Adaptive Platform) trial, led by **Prof Joshua Davis**, with findings published in the New England Journal of Medicine[3] and The Lancet[4] in June, and recent coverage in the Newcastle Herald[5].

SNAP is an international trial evaluating a range of interventions to improve outcomes for patients with Staphylococcus aureus bacteraemia (bloodstream infections). The study found that the standard antibiotic, flucloxacillin, should no longer be the drug of choice, with cefazolin and penicillin shown to be safer and equally effective alternatives for two different strains of Staphylococcus aureus.

[1] https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/9255737/inna-051-nasal-spray-that-blocks-viruses-passed-phase-ii-a-trial/
[2] https://hmri.org.au/news-and-stories/building-a-stronger-first-line-of-defence-against-respiratory-viruses/
[3] https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMoa2506905
[4] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(26)00761-0/fulltext
[5] https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/9294520/golden-staph-infection-antibiotic-trial-to-reduce-deaths-university-of-newcastle-co-led-the-trial-through-professor-joshua-davis-professor-todd-lee-comments/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily_Morning_Newcastle_Herald&utm_id=6c0836b3-bdff-498d-9ad9-27707ca12d3c &utm_term=6a42cec7e34a0c3af96f7acef8839027

Prof Brett Mitchell led the Hospital Acquired Pneumonia Prevention (HAPPEN) trial, which found that improving oral hygiene in patients can reduce the risk of non-ventilator associated hospital-acquired pneumonia (NV-HAP) by 60%. The trial involved more than 8,000 patients across three Australian hospitals and concluded after 14 months in August 2025.

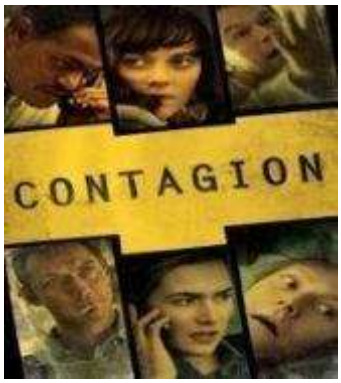
It is the largest multicentre randomised controlled trial (RCT) focused on NV-HAP prevention ever conducted and has recently been published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases[6].

Results from the PREVENT study have been published in the Journal of Infectious Diseases[7].

This study evaluated the feasibility of long-term, community-based surveillance for respiratory viruses using weekly nasal swabs collected from Flutracking participants in the Hunter New England region.

Over 53 weeks, more than 2,000 samples were collected, with strong ongoing participation, revealing frequent circulation of respiratory viruses throughout the year. The findings demonstrate that this approach is practical and could form the basis of a broader early-warning surveillance system for emerging respiratory threats.

SAVE THE DATE -



[6] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(26)00235-5/fulltext
[7] https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/233/4/e1031/8380270

Join us on the evening of **Friday 18 September** at Tower Cinemas Newcastle for a screening of the classic pandemic film Contagion[8], which follows the rapid global spread of a deadly virus and the efforts of medical professionals to contain it.

Further details will be shared soon, but the evening will include snacks and drinks, along with commentary from our own IRP experts.

Hunter Medical Research Institute

Seminar Series

IRP members will be presenting at the HMRI Seminar Series on **Tuesday 11 August** from 12–1pm, held at HMRI in the Caves Lecture Theatre and available via Zoom. Further details, including presenters and topics, will be shared by HMRI closer to the event date.

STAFF UPDATES -

Congratulations to Natalie and her partner Tom on the safe arrival of their daughter, Chloe, who was born on Tuesday 16 June! Wishing the family all the very best as they enjoy this special time together.

[8] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1598778/

Contact: For any questions, contributions or feedback, please contact Stacey Wilks at stacey.wilks@newcastle.edu.au. Stacey is currently acting as Program Manager while Natalie is on leave.