

<b>DATE:</b>	2021 November 1
<b>TO:</b>	Health Care Practitioners in Alberta
<b>FROM:</b>	Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
<b>RE:</b>	Update to SARS-CoV-2 Variant of Concern Testing

---

## PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE

---

### Key Message

- Effective November 1, 2021, SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern testing will be performed primarily for surveillance purposes and no longer for acute clinical or Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) management.
- Variant of concern results will still be reported but the average turnaround time will be extended to at least seven days.
- For IPC guidance about patient cohorting, please contact your site/local IPC team.

### Background

- Testing for variants of concern, including Alpha (B.1.1.7), Beta (B.1.351), Gamma (P.1), and Delta (B.1.617.2), has been carried out routinely at the APL – Public Health Lab on COVID-19 positive samples since February 2021.
- The identification of variants and monitoring virus evolution is important for public health surveillance purposes, such as monitoring for vaccine effectiveness, transmissibility, and disease severity potentially associated with specific viral lineages.
- Variant testing consists of two complementary approaches: (i) screening PCR tests targeting characteristic mutations and (ii) genome sequencing.
- Because variant testing is highly resource intensive and the APL – Public Health Lab also performs diagnostic COVID-19 and other time-sensitive testing, variant testing will be performed less frequently with a longer turnaround time.
- As a result, variant test results will not be as readily available to aid in acute care decisions regarding IPC and clinical management, Workplace or Occupational Health and Safety practices, and outbreak and exposure management.
- As described in a [previous bulletin](#), variant screening will continue to be performed for specific populations. Whole genome sequencing will continue to be performed to help identify the emergence of new variants of public health concern.

### Actions Required

- Be aware that variant of concern test results will not be available for acute care patient decision-making due to an extended turnaround time.
- Consult the Virologist on-call (Edmonton 780-407-8822; Calgary 403-333-4942) on a case-by-case basis if variant of concern testing is needed for clinical management of a patient.

### Inquiries and feedback may be directed to

- Dr. Nathan Zelyas, Medical Microbiologist, APL, [Nathan.Zelyas@aplabs.ca](mailto:Nathan.Zelyas@aplabs.ca)

### Approved by

- Dr. Graham Tipples, Medical Scientific Director, APL – Public Health Laboratory