



Date: May 29, 2020
To: All Health Care Providers
From: Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
Re: Change in ordering Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP) and COVID-19 testing

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Key message:

- The Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP) will no longer be automatically performed in parallel for all COVID-19 tests ordered for hospitalized, emergency department (ED)/urgent care (UC), and continuing care (CC) patients.
- If COVID-19 testing is ordered, only COVID-19 detection will be performed.
- For hospitalized, ED/UC, and CC patients, RPP testing should only be ordered when the patient has influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms AND identifying the viral cause will change clinical management.
- **Discontinuation of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) precautions should be based on symptom resolution and the clinical context, not test results.** If a patient has ILI symptoms BUT negative test results, AND there is no alternate plausible clinical diagnosis, they should remain isolated with Contact and Droplet precautions until symptoms resolve.¹

Background:

- COVID-19 primarily presents as an ILI (cough, runny nose, fever), but can occasionally present with other non-ILI symptoms such as diarrhea and vomiting.
- The RPP tests for viral causes of ILI including influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, enterovirus, rhinovirus, parainfluenza viruses, human metapneumovirus, adenovirus, and seasonal coronaviruses (but **not** SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19).
- Automatic RPP ordering for all COVID-19 test requests has up until now been in effect for populations in acute care and continuing care settings.
- Testing for RPP is not indicated in many suspect COVID-19 patients, especially when typical ILI symptoms are not present and respiratory viruses other than SARS-CoV-2 are not circulating.

Action Required:

- For sites using Meditech, continue current processes for ordering, as RPP and COVID-19 testing are already ordered separately.
- If only COVID-19 testing is needed, order COVID-19 testing in the clinical information system (CIS) or on the laboratory requisition.
- For patients in which RPP testing is clinically indicated AND the results will make a change in clinical management, order RPP in the CIS or on the laboratory requisition.
- When both RPP and COVID-19 are ordered, only one specimen is required for both tests. **DO NOT** collect two specimens for the separate tests.

Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:

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References:

1. AHS Acute Care COVID-19 Expanded Testing Algorithm:
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-expanded-testing.pdf>