



Date: November 19, 2020
To: Physicians, Nurses, Unit Locations at South Zone and Central Zone Hospitals
From: Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) Microbiology Section and Public Health Laboratory (ProvLab), Calgary
Re: Changes to Respiratory Viral Testing - COVID-19, Influenza/RSV, and Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP)

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Key Messages:

- Effective **December 1, 2020**, on-site influenza/RSV testing will recommence at Red Deer Regional Hospital, Chinook Regional Hospital, and Medicine Hat Regional Hospital alongside COVID-19 testing for hospital inpatients.
- The turnaround time (up to 8 hours from specimen receipt at the testing laboratory) will be quicker than routine testing at the APL-Public Health Laboratory (ProvLab).
- Patients will be stratified by admission status and symptoms to determine which test will be performed:
 - On-site COVID-19 testing will be performed for **hospital inpatients and patients being admitted** who have **influenza-like illness (ILI), COVID-19 symptoms**, or are part of an **outbreak investigation**.
 - On-site influenza/RSV testing will be performed for **hospital inpatients and patients being admitted** who have **ILI symptoms**.
 - COVID-19 testing for **patients without ILI or COVID-19 symptoms** will be sent to ProvLab. Influenza testing is not performed on asymptomatic patients.
 - COVID-19 and influenza testing ordered on **outpatients and patients being discharged from ED** will be sent to ProvLab.
 - **Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP)** testing will continue at ProvLab and will be limited to patients with ILI symptoms **and** critical respiratory failure, severe immunocompromise, or are part of an outbreak investigation. Patients with myocarditis, pericarditis, or acute flaccid paralysis also qualify for the RPP.
- **Infection prevention & control (IPC) precautions are based on symptoms and risk assessment. Test results should not be used to discontinue IPC precautions in symptomatic or high-risk patients.** Please refer to updated IPC Guidelines found below.

Why This Is Important:

- Testing capacity is limited. Testing utilization based on provided clinical history will help deploy these tests equitably and effectively, and to maximize clinical impact.
- Both on-site COVID-19 and influenza/RSV testing will be performed on the Simplexa platform.



Action Required:

- Acceptable specimens for testing include nasopharyngeal swabs, aspirates, and bronchoscopic specimens. Throat swabs will only be tested for COVID-19.
- At sites on Meditech, all viral respiratory testing, including COVID-19, influenza, RSV, and RPP, should be ordered in Meditech using **VIROV1**.
- To order VIROV1, the following information about the patient is required:
 - **admission status:** hospital inpatient/being admitted, or outpatient/being discharged from ER
 - **symptoms:** influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms, other COVID-19 symptoms, or neither
 - **RPP criteria** (if applicable): critical respiratory failure, severe immunocompromise, outbreak investigation, pre-transplant screen, myocarditis/pericarditis, and acute flaccid paralysis
 - If RPP testing is required for a patient who does not meet these criteria, consult the ProvLab Virologist On-Call (VOC) at 403-333-4942 prior to specimen collection.
- Ensure that staff ordering the test on Meditech are provided with the above information during the ordering process, as a complete and accurate requisition is needed by the laboratory to appropriately triage testing.
- **If influenza/RSV or RPP is ordered without the required history, the test will be not be performed.**
- For sites that do not have access to Meditech, use the COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Viruses requisition (see below).

References:

- **IP&C Guidelines for Discontinuation of Contact and Droplet Precautions for COVID-19:**
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21624.pdf>
- **COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Viruses Requisition** (available Nov. 24, 2020):
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21701.pdf>

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This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:

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