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**Date:** November 19, 2020  
**To:** Physicians, Nurses, Unit Locations at Calgary 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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**PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE**

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**Key Messages:**

- Effective **November 24, 2020**, influenza/RSV testing will recommence at APL-Calgary Diagnostic & Scientific Centre (DSC) site 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 the test performed:
  - On-site COVID-19 testing at the DSC 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 at the DSC 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, acute flaccid paralysis, or are undergoing pre-transplant investigation 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 the updated IPC Guidelines found below.

**Why This Is Important:**

- Testing capacity on these platforms is limited. Testing utilization based on provided clinical history will help deploy these quicker tests equitably and effectively, and to maximize clinical impact
- Due to unprecedented levels of respiratory virus testing, the RPP is being limited to patients likely to receive the most benefit, including critically ill patients and those prone to severe illness caused by other respiratory viruses.
- COVID-19 testing at the DSC will continue to be performed with the BD Max, Simplexa, or GeneXpert COVID-19 assays. Influenza/RSV testing at the DSC will be performed on the Simplexa or GeneXpert influenza/RSV assays.



**Action Required:**

- Acceptable specimens for testing include nasopharyngeal swabs, aspirates, and bronchoscopic specimens. Throat swabs will only be tested for COVID-19.
- In Sunrise Clinical Manager (SCM), all viral respiratory testing, including COVID-19, influenza, and RPP, should be ordered through a newly built order set (Viral Respiratory Infection Testing). After completion of the queries, it will automatically select the appropriate tests.
- The following information about the patient is mandatory in the order set:
  - **admission status:** hospital inpatient/being admitted, or outpatient/being discharged from ED
  - **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. Select “Other” as an RPP criterion and indicate the reason for ordering in the associated text box with the name of the approving Virologist.
- For hospital sites that do not have access to Sunrise Clinical Manager (SCM), use the COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Viruses requisition (see below), effective Dec. 1, 2020.

**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** (link available Nov. 24, 2020):  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21701.pdf>

**Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:**

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**This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:**

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