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DynaLIFE MEDICAL LABS

Laboratory Bulletin

Date: November 19, 2020
To: North Zone, North Zone Physicians, Nurses, Unit Locations
From: Microbiology Section, Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) and *DynaLIFE* Medical Labs
Re: Updates to COVID-19 and respiratory virus testing in North Zone

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Key messages

- Effective Dec. 1, 2020, on-site influenza/RSV testing is being introduced to Northern Lights Regional Health Centre (NLRHC), Northwest Health Centre (NWHC), and Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (QEII), alongside current on-site COVID-19 testing. Acute care facilities referring samples for COVID-19 testing at one of these three sites will also have influenza/RSV tested at that site.
- The respiratory pathogen panel (RPP) will continue to be performed at APL – Public Health Laboratory (ProvLab), subject to new criteria outlined below.

COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory virus testing criteria

Symptoms	Population/setting	Test(s) available (site performing testing)
Influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms	· Hospital inpatients · Pending admission to hospital from the emergency department (ED)	COVID-19 + influenza/RSV (local lab)
	· Outpatient/community clinics · Congregate living facilities · Pending discharge from ED/urgent care	COVID-19 + influenza (ProvLab)
Other COVID-19 symptoms (non-ILI, expanded COVID-19 symptoms)	· Hospital inpatients Pending admission to hospital from the emergency department (ED)	COVID-19 (local lab)
· Asymptomatic* · No COVID-19 or ILI symptoms	· Close contacts of cases · Outbreaks	COVID-19 (ProvLab)
Any symptoms	Assessment centres	COVID-19 (ProvLab or DynaLIFE)

Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP) criteria:
· Acute flaccid paralysis
· Myocarditis/pericarditis
· ILI symptoms and:
  · Severely immunocompromised*
  · Critical respiratory failure
  · Outbreak investigation
	Any population/setting (except assessment centres)	RPP (ProvLab)

*Asymptomatic testing ordered under the direction of Public Health or IPC.
*Severely immunocompromised patients include post-transplant patients and those on chemotherapy and immunosuppressive therapy (more examples can be found in References).

- **Infection prevention and 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.** Refer to the IPC COVID-19 guidelines and soon to be released FAQ Document.

Background

- On-site COVID-19 and influenza/RSV testing will continue to be performed on either the Simplexa or GeneXpert platforms, depending on the site.
- Testing capacity is limited. To maximize clinical impact, test utilization guidance based on clinical history is needed to ensure equitable and effective use of these tests.
- For inpatients and patients being admitted, turnaround time will be up to six hours for both COVID-19 and influenza/RSV testing from the time the specimen is received at the laboratory.
- Due to unprecedented levels of RPP testing even during times of low non-COVID-19 respiratory virus circulation (over three times the test volumes normally seen during peak influenza season), RPP testing is being limited to scenarios where it will have impact on clinical, public health, and IPC management. This will allow the laboratory to maintain high levels of COVID-19 testing, conserve resources, and provide timely COVID-19 and influenza/RSV results.

Actions required

- Acceptable specimens for testing include nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs, NP aspirates, endotracheal tube secretions, and bronchoscopic specimens. Throat swabs will only be tested for COVID-19.
- In Meditech, all viral respiratory testing, including COVID-19, influenza, and RPP, should be ordered through **VIROV1**.
- To order VIROV1, the following information about the patient is required:
    - **Admission status**: hospital inpatient/being admitted, or an outpatient/being discharged
    - **Symptoms**: influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms, other COVID-19 symptoms, or neither
    - **RPP criteria** (if applicable): critical respiratory failure, severe immunocompromise, outbreak investigation, myocarditis/pericarditis, and acute flaccid paralysis
        - If RPP testing is required for a patient who does not fulfill the RPP criteria, consult the ProvLab Virologist on-call (VOC) at 780-407-8822 prior to sample 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 testing is ordered without the required history, the test will not be performed.**
- For sites not using Meditech and using paper requisitions, a new COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses testing requisition is being implemented. See the below link and refer to the “COVID-19 and other respiratory virus testing changes – all zones” bulletin that provides instructions for filling out the requisition.

References

- IPC COVID-19 Guidelines: 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
- List of immunocompromised conditions: https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/hi-ipc-immunocompromised-patients.pdf

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