

Date: August 12, 2014
To: Laboratory, Physicians, Emergency Clinical Network, Nursing - Central Zone
From: AHS Laboratory Services
Re: Management of Patients with Acute Abnormal ECG Interpretations

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Key Messages:

Effective September 2, 2014, a provincial standardized process will be implemented for the urgent care of community patients that present to Laboratory Services for ECG testing and are observed to have an acute abnormal ECG pattern based on the interpretation by the ECG instrument and/or a certified ECG reader.

Laboratory and diagnostic imaging personnel are not permitted to interpret ECG results.

The applicable acute abnormal ECG interpretations include: Acute critical Interpretations:

- Acute MI or STEMI = ST elevation myocardial Infarction or acute MI
- Ventricular tachycardia or Sinus Ventricular Tachycardia
- Complete heart block or 3rd degree heart block
- Extremely high heart rate (greater than 140 bpm) or sinus tachycardia with beats/min
- Extremely low heart rate (less than 35 bpm) or marked bradycardia

Urgent care options include:

- Immediate call to requesting practitioner who will direct patient care, OR, if unable to contact the requesting practitioner,
- Take the patient to Emergency Department ,
- Call 911 for Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

Patients that refuse to go to the Emergency Department or to be assessed by EMS will be required to sign an Abnormal Electrocardiogram (ECG) Waiver form.

Why this is important:

This process is intended to overcome the potential for a delay in urgent patient care that can result based on the time required for routine ECG interpretation by a physician.

Action Required:

- Physicians should not send symptomatic patients to community testing sites for STAT ECG testing. Symptomatic patients should be directed to the nearest Emergency Department.
- Incorporate this provincial standard into current practices.

Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:

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This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:

Dr. James Wesenberg, Provincial Medical / Scientific Director, AHS Laboratory Services