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**Date:** March 6, 2020  
**To:** All physicians  
**From:** Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory  
**Re:** Novel coronavirus causing COVID-19 laboratory update

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**Key Messages:**

Effective March 7, 2020, COVID-19 testing is being expanded in the below manner:

- **Hospitalized and emergency department patients with respiratory virus testing ordered:** COVID-19 testing will be added along with the usual respiratory pathogen panel (RPP).
- **Hospitalized and emergency department patients with rapid influenza/RSV testing ordered (if available at that site):** COVID-19 testing will be performed along with the rapid influenza/RSV test.
- **Influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreak patients:** COVID-19 testing will be performed, with or without the RPP, depending on what is requested.
- **Community patients with respiratory virus testing ordered:** either COVID-19 or influenza testing will be performed, depending on what is requested.
  
- Infection with this pathogen should be considered in patients with fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath **who travelled outside of Canada within the last 14 days.**
- Symptomatic individuals outside of these criteria may also be considered for testing if, in the clinician's opinion, there is a reason to suspect COVID-19.

**SAMPLE SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

- A nasopharyngeal swab in Universal Transport Medium should be submitted for testing. **Only one sample is required for both COVID-19 testing and the routine respiratory virus testing.** If the patient is producing sputum or if bronchoscopy is performed, a lower respiratory tract specimen should also be tested.
- **Symptomatic** hospitalized, emergency department and ILI outbreak patients will automatically have COVID-19 testing done.
- Community patient test requests can be made by submitting respiratory specimens with the **Serology and Molecular Testing Requisition (<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-20676.pdf>) and writing "COVID-19"** in the bottom box (Specify Other Serology and Molecular Tests).
- For sites using Connect Care, use the above paper requisition to order COVID-19 testing.
- Sites using Sunrise Clinical Manager (SCM) can order COVID-19 testing through SCM.
- Specimens can be shipped to APL-Public Health Lab as per routine practices but known COVID-19 positive patients specimens must be shipped as Transportation of Dangerous Goods Category B (TDG B).
  - For information on TDG B shipping requirements, call the ProvLab Virologist on-call (VOC) in Edmonton (780-407-8822) or Calgary (403-333-4942).



**TEST RESULTS**

- Please note that COVID-19 results cannot be reported on Connect Care. Other reporting platforms (e.g., Netcare, Sunrise Clinical Manager, faxed reports) should be used to obtain results.
- Physicians with COVID-19 positive patients will be notified by the APL-Public Health Lab Virologist on-call (VOC) or the local Medical Officer of Health (MOH).
- **Please note that the seasonal coronaviruses detected on the routine RPP run at ProvLab (i.e., 229E, HKU1, NL63, and OC43) are not related to the current COVID-19 outbreak.**

**Background:**

The COVID-19 outbreak continues to spread to more countries across the world. As the outbreak evolves, the laboratory is expanding testing to improve the detection of COVID-19 in the population. This will aid in implementing local containment measures for the outbreak.

**Action Required:**

- Expect COVID-19 test results on all hospitalized, emergency department, and outbreak patients for whom respiratory virus testing is ordered.
- Community patients will have COVID-19 testing if requested by the physician.

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

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

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