



Date: January 17, 2020
To: All Physicians
From: Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
Re: Novel Coronavirus Detected in Wuhan, China

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Key Message:

- A novel coronavirus (CoV) has been implicated in an outbreak of viral pneumonia in the city of Wuhan, China (see <https://www.who.int/csr/don/12-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-china/en/>).
- Although the current risk to Albertans is low, infection with this pathogen should be considered in cases of acute respiratory illness without a clear etiology in patients who have traveled in the prior 14 days to Wuhan.
- Prior **to collecting specimens from suspect cases**, contact the Zone Medical Officer of Health (MOH) and the ProvLab Virologist-on-Call (VOC) to ensure testing is carried out appropriately.
- Both upper (e.g. nasopharyngeal swab) and lower (if feasible) respiratory tract specimens should be collected for testing.
- ProvLab will work with the National Microbiology Laboratory (Winnipeg) for the provision of novel CoV testing as needed.

Background:

- In December 2019, dozens of patients in the city of Wuhan fell ill with an unknown pathogen. Typical and atypical respiratory organisms (seasonal influenza and other common viruses, avian influenza, SARS-CoV, and MERS-CoV) were ruled out and reports are now available that a novel CoV is the likely cause of the outbreak. The suspected source of infection is a single seafood and animal market where almost all of the cases had spent time preceding illness. As of January 16, 2020, there has been one reported death out of 41 cases in a patient with other significant pre-existing comorbidities and one imported case each in Thailand and Japan in travelers from Wuhan. While it is unclear if human-to-human transmission is possible, it does not appear to be significantly contributing to the current cluster of disease. Although risk is low, all suspect cases should prompt MOH and VOC consultation to ensure appropriate testing is done.

Action Required:

- Contact the Zone MOH and APL-Public Health (ProvLab) VOC when testing is desired for a suspect case of novel CoV in a patient recently returned from Wuhan.
- Ill travelers who have not visited Wuhan do not require MOH and VOC consultation prior to submitting specimens for routine testing.

Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:

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This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:

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