Date: May 4, 2020
To: South Zone, Central Zone ER Physicians, Nurses, and Emergency Room Staff
From: Microbiology Section, Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL)
Re: REVISED: Expansion of Rapid COVID-19 Testing to ED Patients at RDRH, CRH, MHRH

PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE

Key Message:
- Effective May 4, 2020, COVID-19 testing on specimens submitted from ED patients at Red Deer Regional Hospital (RDRH), Chinook Regional Hospital (CRH), Medicine Hat Regional Hospital (MHRH), and surrounding rural hospitals will be performed using the rapid Simplexa® nucleic acid test (NAT). All inpatients will continue to have the Simplexa® test performed.
- Results will be available within 6 hours of receipt at the RDRH, CRH, and MHRH laboratories.
  - Specimens will be transported to RDRH, CRH and MHRH by routine courier.
- Acceptable specimens include nasopharyngeal/throat swabs (in Universal Transport Media (UTM), ESwab, saline, but not APTIMA), nasopharyngeal aspirates, endotracheal tube aspirates, and bronchoalveolar lavages.
- Specimens collected from patients in Assessment Centres and in the community will continue to be forwarded to the APL-Public Health Laboratory.

Why This Is Important:
- The Simplexa® assay targets the ORF1ab region and the S gene of SARS-CoV-2, the etiologic agent of COVID-19.
- Its performance is equivalent to the lab-developed test used at the APL Public Health Laboratory. Additional confirmatory testing is not necessary.

Action Required:
- Ensure all orders for rapid COVID-19 are submitted in Meditech (see flow chart attached).
  - If rapid COVID-19 testing is required, order specifically as "rapid COVID-19".
  - If COVID-19 testing is needed, but not urgently, order as “COVID-19” or “routine COVID-19”.
  - If testing for other respiratory viruses is needed, order “RPP”. The respiratory pathogen panel (RPP) will no longer be automatically performed on all COVID-19 tests.
- Repeat rapid COVID-19 test requests and testing of outpatients will continue to be sent to the APL-Public Health Laboratory in Calgary.
- All results will be available in Netcare. The results will not be viewable in Meditech.
- Contact & droplet precautions should only be discontinued in accordance with Infection Prevention & Control (IP&C) guidelines or consultation, and should take into account the patient’s clinical and radiological findings.

- Ordering staff: all COVID-19 and other viral testing should be ordered as VIROV1.
  - See Meditech instructions on flow chart (attached, shaded boxes).

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This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:
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