



Date: March 11, 2020
To: All physicians
From: Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
Re: Change to community influenza testing

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Key Messages:

- Due to recent increased test volumes for COVID-19, the APL – Public Health Laboratory is changing its respiratory virus testing algorithm for community patients.
- Previously, respiratory samples submitted from physicians’ outpatient clinics were tested only for influenza A and B.
- Starting March 12, 2020, all respiratory virus samples submitted from community patients (non-emergency room patients) will be tested only for COVID-19.
- If influenza testing is required, contact the Virologist on-call (VOC) to discuss the need for testing.
- The testing algorithms for other groups of patients is remaining the same.

Background:

Because community patients are typically not severely ill and results are often available well after 48 hours of symptom onset, testing in community patients for influenza has limited clinical utility. With the aggressive case-finding testing provided by the laboratory for COVID-19, resources are being directed toward this effort. Please refer to the below table for a summary of the respiratory virus testing algorithm.

Population	Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP)*	COVID-19	Rapid influenza/RSV
Community patients**		X	
Hospitalized patients	X	X	
Emergency room (ER) patients (including urgent care centers)	X	X	
Respiratory illness outbreak patients	X	X	
Hospitalized and ER patients with local rapid influenza/RSV testing		X	X

*The RPP is a panel which includes influenza A/B, RSV, parainfluenza virus 1-4, metapneumovirus, enterovirus, adenovirus, coronavirus 229E, NL63, OC43, HKU1, and *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*.

**Community patients who are immunocompromised due to solid organ or bone marrow transplant are to receive both RPP and COVID-19 testing. “Transplant patient” should be clearly marked on the requisition.

Action Required:

- No action is required. Community patient specimens will have COVID-19 rather than influenza testing.
- If influenza testing is desired, call the VOC (Edmonton 780-407-8822; Calgary 403-333-3940).



Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:

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This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:

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