

Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Memorandum

To: Physicians and Health Service Directors, Central Zone

From: Dr Todd Hatchette, Chief of Service, Central Zone Microbiology
Charles Heinstein, Manager, Central Zone Microbiology

Date: May 1, 2019

Subject: **Changes to Group A Streptococcus (GAS) testing**

As of May 1, 2019 the Central Zone Microbiology laboratory will discontinue using rapid antigen detection kits (RADT) for the detection of Group A Streptococcus (GAS). The Microbiology Laboratory will continue to offer swabs for throat culture with positive results available within 24 hours.

Rationale: Rapid antigen detection tests for GAS is ideally used at the point of care when the results can influence direct patient care. It has no utility in a centralized laboratory service where the results of the test will be relayed back to the ordering physician after the patient has left the office. Waiting 24 hours for the culture results does not reduce the effectiveness of antibiotics at preventing the known suppurative and non-suppurative complications. There are also some data that delaying treatment in children is associated with fewer subsequent cases of GAS pharyngitis.

In addition, swabs for throat culture have a number of advantages over RADT including:

- It is more sensitive and specific.
- It has the capability of detecting other pharyngeal pathogens such as Groups C and G *Streptococci* and *Arcanobacterium haemolyticum*, none of which can be detected by RADT.
- It is significantly less expensive

Specimen: Specimen should be obtained using standard bacterial swabs from the surface of the tonsils (or tonsillar fossae) and the posterior pharyngeal wall.

Utilization: Testing not recommended if the clinical features strongly suggest a viral infection and routine testing after completion of treatment (test of cure) is not recommended.

Community based laboratories at Cobequid and Hants will continue to offer rapid antigen detection to support the clinical needs of the local emergency departments.

Reference : Shulman ST, Bisno AL, Clegg HW, Gerber MA, Kaplan EL, Lee G, Martin JM, Van Beneden C; Infectious Diseases Society of America. [Clinical practice guideline for the diagnosis and management of group A streptococcal pharyngitis: 2012 update by the Infectious Diseases Society of America](#). Clin Infect Dis. 2012 Nov 15;55(10):e86-102.

If you have any questions, please contact the laboratory at 902-473-2120, Dr. Hatchette (902-473-6885) or Charles Heinstein (902-473-2231).