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25 October 2016

## Consultation document

# Diagnostic Testing for Scabies at Labtests and Northland Pathology Laboratory

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Scabies is an infestation caused by the female scabies mite (*Sarcoptes scabiei*). It causes intense itch, particularly at night. The itch is due to an allergic reaction of the mite's trail of debris, faeces, and saliva. Scabies occurs worldwide and is often associated with poverty and over-crowding. In children transmission commonly occurs at day-care centres, schools, or sleepovers, while in the elderly transmission tends to occur in residential care facilities.

The diagnosis is usually made clinically. Laboratory testing is performed by taking scrapings from the suspicious looking area of skin. However, this has poor sensitivity even in the hands of very experienced dermatologists or laboratory technicians/scientists.

At Labtests/NPL, our positivity rate for scabies examination is very low at < 10%. This may be due to the skill of the phlebotomists who are collecting the sample, pre-treatment of the patient, or absence of scabies on the patient. Also, a well person with scabies may have as few as 15 mites in total. The exception to this is crusted scabies where several hundred to thousands of mites may be present.

Other laboratories around New Zealand also report low positivity rates.

## **2. CURRENT SERVICE**

Currently, phlebotomists at Labtests and NPL collect skin scrapings for scabies examination. They are trained to perform the scraping but as their core work is phlebotomy they are not experts in scabies examination or specimen collection.

Our pick up rate in the laboratory is very low, which is likely to be due to a number of factors outlined above.

## **3. RATIONALE FOR CHANGE**

It is recommended that scabies be diagnosed clinically in most cases. Diagnosis and response to treatment can be complicated by the allergic response to dying/dead mites following treatment, and primary care practitioners should be aware that on-going itch does not necessarily equate to treatment failure.

Our current testing protocol is not providing particularly useful information as we seldom report a positive and the value of a negative result, when the sensitivity of the test is known to be poor, is negligible.

## **4. PROPOSED NEW SERVICE**

Scabies scrapings will only be performed following a discussion of the primary care doctor with a clinical microbiologist. If it is thought that a scraping is required, Labtests/NPL will attempt to ensure that the most experienced person available performs the specimen collection procedure.

#### **4.1 IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSED NEW SERVICE**

Primary care practitioners will diagnose and manage scabies clinically (much as they are doing now). Laboratory testing will be available after discussion with the clinical microbiologist, providing it is considered to be indicated.

### **5. CONSULTATION PROCESS**

#### **5.1 WHAT ARE WE CONSULTING ON**

We are consulting on limiting the availability of scabies scrapings in the Auckland and Northland communities.

#### **5.2 WHO IS BEING CONSULTED**

We will consult with the following groups:

1. Healthcare providers on the Labtests/NPL communication database
2. PHOs in the Auckland and Northland regions
3. The Joint Advisory Group for Laboratory Testing
4. The four Auckland and Northland DHBs via the Chief Medical Officers
5. The Auckland and Northland Pathways groups

#### **5.3 CONSULTATION TIMELINE**

Consultation document release Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Feedback deadline 5pm Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Decision announcement Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2016

#### **5.4 HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK**

Please give feedback to:

Dr Arlo Upton

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#### **5.5 DECISION**

A decision will be made by Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2016 and communicated to stakeholders and specifically to those who gave feedback.

## 6. REFERENCES

Scabies – Diagnosis and Management. Bpac –Feb 2009

[http://www.bpac.org.nz/BPJ/2009/february/docs/bpj19\\_scabies\\_pages\\_12-16.pdf](http://www.bpac.org.nz/BPJ/2009/february/docs/bpj19_scabies_pages_12-16.pdf)

NZ Formulary – Scabies - [http://www.nzf.org.nz/nzf\\_6587?searchterm=scabies](http://www.nzf.org.nz/nzf_6587?searchterm=scabies)

Dermnet - <http://www.dermnetnz.org/topics/scabies/>

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