

Laboratory Update

20 May 2015



Topics in this newsletter:

- Testing on patients suspected of having a Rubella infection
- Pre analytical errors and our quest for reducing the incidence of these types of errors.
- Changes to approval process for LabPLUS referred tests
- Our new and improved website: www.norpath.co.nz

Rubella IgM testing

Rubella infection is rare in New Zealand; in 2014 only four cases were reported. There has not been an outbreak of rubella in NZ since 1995/6. However, there are many people living in NZ who may not have been immunised or who have not had natural rubella infection. Typically these are people who have opted out of immunisation or have emigrated to NZ from less developed countries.

Rubella is a mild febrile viral illness characterised by a diffuse punctate and maculopapular rash. Children usually experience few or no constitutional symptoms but adults may experience a one to five day prodrome of low-grade fever, headache, malaise, mild coryza and conjunctivitis. Postauricular, occipital and posterior cervical lymphadenopathy is common and precedes the rash by five to ten days. The differential diagnosis includes enterovirus, measles, human parvovirus ('slapped cheek') infection, human herpesvirus 6 (roseola) infection, and a number of other rashes of varied aetiology. Rash (usually vaccine strain measles) can occur after MMR vaccination in approximately 5% of patients.

Diagnosis of rubella

Where the following is present the best test to do is a throat swab for rubella PCR. This must be done within three days of rash developing.

1. There is convincing evidence of exposure from travelling or overseas visitor, **or**
2. Clinical presentation is exceptionally convincing

The throat swab must be collected using a flocked swab placed into a UTM tube. Clinical details including date of onset of rash and date of any MMR vaccination *must* be included with the request. The case *must* be notified to public health as a possible case at the time of laboratory testing request.

The role of serology

Serological testing is mainly useful for determining immunity to rubella by demonstrating the presence of rubella IgG. In a patient with rash present for more than three days IgM testing may be of use.

We have noted that occasionally rubella IgM testing has been requested in patients without a clear history of contact or without rash. Low-level IgM (presumably non-specific) results are not uncommon and can lead to unnecessary investigation and concern.

For this reason Northland Pathology will be restricting rubella IgM testing from 1st June 2015. When rubella IgM is requested an automatic comment will go out to the referrer stating the following:

"Rubella IgM has NOT been performed. If your patient has rash and you are concerned about rubella infection please request throat swab for rubella PCR and telephone public health to notify the possible case. Please also provide clear clinical details

including the date of the onset of the rash and of MMR vaccination. If you would like to discuss this further please telephone our clinical microbiologists.”

If you would like to provide feedback on this change please contact Dr Arlo Upton at arlo.upton@labtests.co.nz

Pre analytical errors

It is commonly known that nowadays pre-analytical errors, which are errors that occur during patient preparation, specimen collection, and transportation to the laboratory reception, are the main cause for incorrect test results.

In previous newsletters we have on regular occasions pointed out the importance of ensuring that specimen collection procedures are carried out correctly and, possibly as a result of this, over the last few years we have already seen a significant reduction in the number of most common pre-analytical errors: incorrect labelling and incorrect specimens.

However we still receive around:

- 300 referrals each month where specimens are unlabelled, mislabelled or insufficiently labelled
- 350 specimens that have not been collected or handled properly or are insufficient

These errors result in recollects being required and/or delay in processing and reporting of test results.

May we ask those who refer patients and/or collect specimens to ensure that correct and complete patient details are present on the referrals form(s) and specimen(s) and that the specimens are collected as per instructions in our Test Index Manual which is distributed to all surgeries. This Test Index Manual can also be found on our website: www.norpath.co.nz

Specimen labelling

A correctly labelled specimen has:

- At least 2 complete patient identifiers: full name, and date of birth or full name and NHI
- Details all of which exactly match with the details on the referral form
- A date and time of collection

Please note that in addition to correct labelling it is also important that:

- Patients are also properly informed about any special requirements with regard to the specimen collection, examples being:
 - fasting / non fasting
 - timing of visit for therapeutic drug levels (usually trough levels)
 - food and/or drug intake restrictions
- A proper assessment is made, and noted as such on the referral form, whether or not the patient is eligible for public funding for the referral. When the patient is not eligible for funding: payment needs to be ensured at point of collection of specimens.

Our website (www.norpath.co.nz) provides extensive information for patients and referrers on specimen requirements and funding eligibility.

Labplus referred tests

Labplus has recently changed their policy that deals with referral restrictions for a number of tests.

Instead of restricting certain tests to specialist only, or requiring pre-approval from a Labplus pathologist, the laboratory will now reserve the right to vet certain tests, as indicated in the Labplus Test guide.

In most instances it is very important that appropriate clinical information is provided on the referral form as this will enable the Labplus pathologists to properly assess the referral.

For more information check out the Labplus Test Guide which can be found on their website (<http://testguide.adhb.govt.nz/EGuide/>). A link to the Labplus website can also be found on our website.

New look Northland Pathology website

Recently our new and improved website has gone live: www.norpath.co.nz

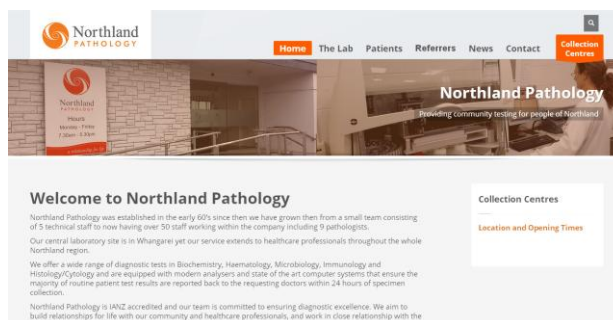
On this website one can find useful information for referrers and patients with regard to the services we offer, like:

- Contact details and opening hours of laboratory and collection centres
- Specimen collection instruction sheets for patients
- Our current Test Index Manual for surgeries
- News
- a funding eligibility guide and prices for non-funded tests
- Useful links

We will continue to develop and improve this website in the near future.

Future Laboratory Updates will not be distributed as hard copies anymore, but instead can be downloaded from this website.

If you would like to receive email notification when new issues of this Laboratory Update have been posted here: please inform us by sending an email using the “Contact” tab on our website (message: “Laboratory Update”)



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