



Messenger

Coronavirus (Corona-sars-Cov2 Virus) Laboratory Action

At present, the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory (SLOPHL) has performed over 2,300 Corona-sars-Cov2 virus (COV 2 for short) PCR tests, with about 4% positive. Santa Barbara County, Ventura County, the State Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory (VRDL), and 21 other local public health laboratories have performed more than 70,000 tests with nearly 10,000 positive results using the COV 2 reverse transcription PCR test developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Virtually all commercial laboratories, including Quest, LabCorp, Sonic Healthcare (WestPac laboratory), ARUP and hospital labs are responding to the state-wide and nation-wide demand for testing.

The SLOPHL, as well as other public health labs, has initiated testing using the Cepheid Gene Xpert COV 2 test that can be performed in less than an hour and is especially useful for STAT testing. Under the authority of County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein, a COV 2 test without a charge will be added by the SLOPHL to all orders for Respiratory or Pneumonia PCR panels, to increase testing.

Because each incident of exposure by an infected individual warrants contact tracing, with quarantine of exposed individuals and subsequent testing of symptomatic patients, the pandemic creates an ongoing, self-amplifying need for testing. Currently, the California Department of Public Health Testing Task Force has set a goal of 60,000 tests per day to detect new cases and allow for contact tracing and subsequent public health interventions.

While other alternative specimens including oral fluids and saliva specimens are under study, the SLOPHL still recommends collection of a nasopharyngeal swab, a throat swab or a nasal swab in separate viral transport medium (VTM) tubes or saline provided by the SLOPHL.

The SLOPHL continues to caution medical providers not to use serologic testing to diagnose COV 2 infections or to attempt to establish immune status. No serologic test has been conclusively established to provide test results that can be interpreted to inform immune status.

What is known about serology? All three major immunoglobulins (IgM and IgG and IgA) increase in concert and it may take as long as three weeks to reach maximum levels. Using serologic testing during early acute illness will render false negative results for a majority of cases. Even testing two weeks after the cessation of symptoms will miss some infections.

More to come on this issue in subsequent Messengers.

Questions?

Please contact the Laboratory Director at 805-781-5512 or jbeebe@co.slo.ca.us.

County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory
www.slopublichealth.org | (805) 781-5507

