



## MEMORANDUM

To: All Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, & Others Ordering Laboratory Tests, Eastern Health  
Date: May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Re: Outpatient Blood Collection  
From: RHA Laboratory Departments

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Dear Colleagues,

We appreciate that COVID-19 has placed an unprecedented challenge upon physicians and nurse practitioners and their patients with regards to access to laboratory services. The laboratory programs wish to update clinicians on the status of efforts towards opening services for a wider variety of patients, including those for chronic disease monitoring. The recommended approach includes:

- Existing restrictions (urgent tests only) will remain for a little longer and until laboratories increase capacity for blood collection – **this will avoid unacceptable wait-times.**
- Physicians are requested to closely evaluate the frequency of blood collection on patients and reduce it if it is safe to do so – **this will reduce blood collection wait-times.**
- A utilization auditing system will be implemented for quality assurance purposes – **this may help reduce blood collection wait-times and assure system integrity.**

### **Choosing laboratory investigations wisely is now more important than ever!**

#### **A more detailed account of the challenges and rationale for this approach:**

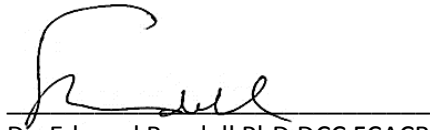
Despite major reductions (>70%) in the number of test requisitions since restrictions were put in place, laboratories are challenged to keep up with blood collection requests, particularly at larger centers. Laboratory programs recognize the importance of expanding services to more patients, including access to blood collection for chronic disease monitoring. **Laboratory programs are aggressively pursuing options to increase blood collection capacity** while staying in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions. However, total capacity for outpatient blood collection is not expected to go beyond about 50% of traditional levels because of physical distancing requirements in blood collection areas. Further notice will be provided when blood collection systems are prepared for a wider scope of testing and larger numbers of patients.

Action on many fronts is required to minimize risk for negative impacts on patients. Episodes of overuse of testing are continuing including inappropriate and excessive frequency of test orders and blood collection. For example, there have been several incidents of consecutive A1C being measured within days of the other test; and a high frequency of weekly INR testing in patients showing stable levels. While many such situations are clinically warranted, we request clinicians to execute due diligence and avoid unnecessarily high frequency blood testing on their patients. **The consequence of inaction is negative impacts on other patients by increasing wait-times for urgent blood collection.** The laboratory will not turn-away any patient with a requisition for urgent blood work. Rather, we recognize the importance of auditing test ordering practices, and

follow-up of situations where ordering frequency appears excessive, or tests ordered are of questionable value. This will be done for quality assurance purposes and is a reasonable action toward assuring the integrity of our blood collection systems. We appreciate your assistance as we work together toward restoring adequate laboratory testing services for our patients.

For peer-reviewed and evidence-based guidance on appropriate use of laboratory testing services we direct you to the excellent work done by Choosing Wisely NL (Found at website: [qualityofcarenl.ca](http://qualityofcarenl.ca)).

Kindest Regards,



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