

COVID-19 Test Order Updates 10.26.20

On October 28, 2020, a new order for COVID-19 and Respiratory Pathogen Panel testing will be available for the inpatient and ED settings. The ambulatory order will not be changing at this time but ambulatory updates will be coming soon.

This new order introduces several new components:

Combined Respiratory Pathogen and COVID-19 Order Set:

Although influenza is not currently present in our region, this new order set will prepare us for when flu activity increases. Team members from Infectious Diseases, Infection Prevention, Microbiology, and the BJC Incident Command are closely monitoring influenza surveillance data and will announce when routine influenza testing will be incorporated into the testing strategy.

The order set will guide the provider to the appropriate test including:

- Respiratory Pathogen Panel (includes multiple respiratory pathogens, including COVID-19)
- COVID-19-only PCR test
- COVID-19 antigen test

COVID-19 Antigen Testing:

To date, all COVID-19 tests performed by BJC have been RT-PCR tests. BJC is introducing the BD Veritor COVID-19 antigen assay. This assay will allow us to offer COVID-19 testing for some indications at each HSO. There are several important limitations to antigen testing:

- Antigen testing is less sensitive than PCR based methods but has good specificity
- Results should be interpreted based on the population being tested

BJC has chosen to use antigen testing in specific **asymptomatic** populations where the negative predictive value will be high:

- ✓ Patient placement in congregate living locations including behavioral health
- ✓ Patients requiring urgent procedure/surgery

Using antigen testing in asymptomatic patient populations increases the likelihood of true negative results. In order to minimize the risk of inaccurate results, providers should not order the antigen-based test for patients who do not meet the criteria detailed in the order.

Please note that Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) guidance indicates that COVID-19 RT-PCR testing is required for screening before any elective surgical procedure. Therefore, AMH, MHB and MHE will continue using the RT-PCR testing in the elective surgery population.

Pooled Specimens for COVID-19:

The IOH lab has validated a “pooled” assay for COVID-19. In this approach, samples from up to 5 patients can be mixed together and analyzed in a single test. If the pooled sample is negative, all individual samples will be reported as negative. If the pooled sample is positive, residual samples from the individual specimens will be re-tested without pooling.

This testing approach will increase BJC’s internal testing capacity. However, it is best used in patient populations where there is a high likelihood of a negative result such as asymptomatic patients undergoing an elective procedure. Clinicians should thoroughly screen patients for symptoms in order to reduce the risk of likelihood of a symptomatic patient being routed to a pooled test. This could result in delays in results.

Repeat COVID-19 Testing in Patients with a Positive Result in Preceding 4 Months

Currently available data suggests that patients who have been infected with COVID-19 may not be susceptible to re-infection for up to 4 months. The order set will provide guidance that repeat testing is not necessary in these patients. Additionally, patients with a prior positive COVID-19 test may have a persistently positive PCR without producing virus that is capable of infecting others after 10 days for most individuals. Immunosuppressed persons or those who were critically ill with COVID-19 may shed viable, infectious virus up to 20 days after their infection. Repeat testing is not recommended in these situations.

Semi-Private Room Use

In light of the rising census at many BJC hospitals, the new order set contains an option to allow for testing of patients who may require a semi-private room. This option was previously only available at BJH but may now be ordered at all HSOs. These tests will be performed on the batched or pooled testing platform.

The availability of testing reagents, supplies, and equipment remains challenging due to the inability of manufacturers to meet the high national demand. The lab and ICC teams continue to assess all new testing options that come available.

All testing orders have been linked with the appropriate infection prevention flags to ensure the safety of other patients and staff members; selecting a test that is not indicated for your patient could put others at risk or deplete test supplies. Utilization of these new testing platforms will be monitored to ensure they are used in accordance with the order guidance.

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