



May 1, 2019

Dear Oregon Local Public Health Authorities,

Oregon State Public Health Laboratory (OSPHL) staff have noticed that local health jurisdictions have different understandings about which specimens to submit while investigating enteric outbreaks. Some jurisdictions are submitting both raw stool for norovirus testing and stool in Cary Blair transport media for every outbreak.

In an effort to focus local public health and public health laboratory efforts where they are needed, laboratory staff encourage you to trust your epidemiologic assessments of likely etiology and only order the tests you need for your investigations.

When the outbreak epidemiology points to norovirus-like viruses as the likely etiology (e.g., high proportion of vomiting, duration of illness <72 hours, no bloody stool):

- Order the Norovirus order choice on the OSPHL Virology/Immunology Test Request Form, and
- Submit specimens for Viral Gastroenteritis Panel, RT-PCR.

When the outbreak epidemiology points to bacterial pathogens as the likely etiology (e.g., low proportion or no vomiting, duration of illness >72 hours, bloody stool, potential bacterial pathogen exposure like farm animals):

- Focus the likely etiology to a particular suspect pathogen if you are able,
- Order a culture for the likely pathogen(s) on the OSPHL General Microbiology Test Request Form, and
- Submit specimens for Enteric Pathogen Culture.

If you are unsure which bacterial pathogen is most likely, order the Enteric Pathogen Culture on the OSPHL General Microbiology Test Request Form.

If the outbreak epidemiology has unclear etiology, not clearly directing you to suspect either viral or bacterial pathogens:

- Collect stool and prepare to submit both raw stool for viral pathogens and stool in Cary Blair for Enteric Pathogen Culture.
- If the etiology becomes clearer, please only send the specimen type that corresponds with the suspected etiology.
- If the etiology remains unclear, the laboratory staff are happy to support you by testing for both viral and bacterial pathogens. Submit both specimens after obtaining approval from your state epidemiologist.

The OSPHL Test Menu is found at www.healthoregon.org/labtests and always provides the most updated specimen submission instructions for available laboratory tests.

If you have questions, please contact Sarah Humphrey, OSPHL Client Services Coordinator, at sarah.m.humphrey@state.or.us or 503-693-4124.

Sincerely,

John L. Fontana, PhD, (HCLD) ABB
Director, OSPHL