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SUBJECT: Herpes Simplex Virus / Varicella-Zoster Virus PCR for Skin Lesions

DATE: 9/12/2012

On 9/24/2012, the URMCL Clinical Virology Lab will begin PCR testing of skin site specimens collected in viral transport medium for Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). The real-time PCR assay is in-house developed and NYS Department of Health approved. It uses the Focus Diagnostics PCR reagents and the 3M Integrated Cyclor for amplification.

The HSV PCR combined with Varicella-Zoster Virus (VZV) PCR, introduced in July, will replace virus culture of skin lesion specimens. The HSV PCR specifically identifies HSV 1 and HSV 2 and has a limit of detection of 200 DNA copies/ ml. Both the HSV and VZV PCR assays are significantly more sensitive than culture. In addition, results, particularly those for VZV, will be provided in a much more timely fashion. Both PCR assays will be routinely performed at least 3 days/week and by special request, results can be made available within one day. At least temporarily, genital specimens will continue to be cultured for HSV with a 4 day incubation time. Most positive HSV cultures are reported within the first 48 hours of incubation. Until we complete our validation studies, specimens with a request for PCR other than skin sites (i.e. blood, CSF, eye) will continue to be sent to our reference lab with a 1-3 day turnaround time.

For questions or additional information, please contact the Virology Lab supervisor, Cindy Mellen.
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