Coronavirus updates

Joint Commission resuming some laboratory survey activities
Earlier in June, The Joint Commission began resuming some laboratory survey activities. The Joint Commission is committed to working closely with organizations, with safety being the first and foremost priority. Account executives are contacting organizations due for a survey to assess the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on their operations and their current state. The Joint Commission is reviewing a variety of factors and criteria for determining where and which organizations will be surveyed, including identifying and then prioritizing low-risk areas in which we can go in safely to survey.

Learn more about the physical distancing safety practices that are being implemented.

Q&A webinars: Get answers on key COVID-19 laboratory topics
To help laboratory staff as they confront challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Joint Commission leaders and experts answered a variety of questions during a May 8 Q&A webinar. Located on the COVID-19 resources webpage, topics addressed in the webinar ranged from infection prevention and control to environment of care and life safety, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) 1135 waivers to Joint Commission standards.

Some of the questions that were addressed during the May 8 webinar included:
- What is the best use for Immunoglobulin G antibody testing? (2:22)
- How reliable are antibody tests for proof of immunity? (3:40)
- Is Abbott testing considered Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments waived? (4:58)
- CMS has authorized the interpretation of cytology and histology slides from alternate locations such as a pathologist’s home. What options are there for the continuation of this practice after the public health emergency ends? (6:02)
- COVID-19 tests designated by the manufacturer for point-of-care use may be performed as waived tests during the public health emergency. After the public health emergency ends, what are the options to continue to perform these tests at locations with Certificates of Waiver? (7:47)
- My lab staff are due for competency assessments this month. Do I still have to do this, or can I postpone it? (9:05)
- Are medical assistants qualified to perform nasopharyngeal swab collections? (9:52)

‘Real Voices. Real Stories.’: Zuretti discusses issues facing hospital labs during pandemic
Joint Commission staff are on the front lines of COVID-19 care, and those experiences are being shared in a new series, ‘Real Voices. Real Stories.’

An Informatics Essentials for Residents (IER) pathology specialist with The Joint Commission, Alejandro Zuretti, MD, also is a medical director of laboratories at Maimonides Medical Center and SUNY Downstate University Hospital in New York. He recently discussed the issues facing hospital laboratories in the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic.
“We are exhausted. Even though we are doing less outside and after work, it’s been difficult. We try to get more sleep than we normally would, but we’re so exhausted from the work, changing needs and adjusting our processes to deal with this crisis. We are not resting well and life is different here now. Many technologists and other laboratory employees have gotten sick, and we suffered the death of one of our technologists.

“The main issue and struggle for our labs is the erratic, or broken, supply chain (for reagents, parts, masks, gloves) and getting things on a consistent basis. While we are focused on getting the testing done quickly and accurately, we are also involved in convalescent plasma therapy, multi-centric studies for drugs such as IL-6 blockers as well as evaluation for antibody assays. We are proud of how dedicated the staff has been, and we know how critical lab testing is.

“Our centers are at the forefront of the pandemic because of the high volume of patients needing care. The University Hospital of Brooklyn has been designated by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo as a COVID-19 only facility. What we are experiencing at the hospitals is obviously very hectic and changes by the day. Because of what has happened, we had to turn a 300-bed nursing home into a convalescent COVID-19 center. We are doing things differently on a daily basis, with all the different platforms (Zoom, Skype, Webex) since we no longer discuss issues or solve most problems in person. There are hundreds of emails of issues to be dealt with, as well as state-wide notifications. We’re constantly trying to adjust.”

Read more “Real Voices. Real Stories.”

COVID-19 resources available for laboratories
We hope you have found this special issue of Lab Focus helpful. In this time of great uncertainty and challenges, The Joint Commission wants the health care community to know we are here to assist in any way we can.

As you continue to navigate caring for patients during this pandemic, additional resources can be found on The Joint Commission’s COVID-19 webpage, including:

- FAQs
  - Quality control testing for COVID-19 tests
  - Validation of COVID-19 tests
- Resources and guidance from:
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
  - U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- Strategies for conserving personal protective equipment

Check out the full list of resources.

Resources

Join our laboratory-specific LinkedIn group
Calling all laboratory staff: Join The Joint Commission’s Laboratory Accreditation LinkedIn group. Check out the page to follow along on industry conversations and to learn about upcoming educational opportunities. Join in with your colleagues on the LinkedIn webpage.