



Messenger

SARS-CoV-2 Omicron Variant Detection

According to recent analyses from the FDA and CDC, most testing methodologies for SARS-CoV-2 continue to reliably detect SARS-CoV-2 variants, including the heavily-mutated Omicron variant. To date, only two tests—the Meridian Bioscience Revogene SARS-CoV-2 assay and the Tide Laboratories DTPM COVID-19 RT-PCR test—have been determined to have a reduced ability to detect Omicron. PCR tests that include an S gene target may help to identify possible infections with Omicron, since the variant is more likely to be negative for the S gene target but positive for other SARS-CoV-2 targets. For additional information, refer to:

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-covid-19-and-medical-devices/sars-cov-2-viral-mutations-impact-covid-19-tests>.

As of mid-December, the Omicron variant has not been detected in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County. The SLO County Public Health Laboratory is monitoring SARS-CoV-2 variants using targeted whole-genome sequencing (WGS). Laboratories are encouraged to submit specimens having a high suspicion of Omicron based on exposure or S-gene dropout for WGS testing.

Influenza Season Update

Nationwide, detection of influenza A (H3N2) viruses by clinical and public health laboratories has increased recently, most commonly among young adults. This represents the first significant activity since March 2020. Influenza A (H3N2) predominant seasons can be severe, especially for older adults and young children. The SLO PHL is accepting specimens (nasopharyngeal swab in viral transport medium) for seasonal influenza virus surveillance without charge. Mark requisitions with "Influenza/COVID-19 surveillance".

Change to HSV and VZV Testing

The SLO County Public Health Laboratory has recently switched to a new testing platform, Solana, to detect Herpes Simplex Virus-1 (HSV-1), HSV-2, and Varicella-Zoster Virus. The Solana instrument uses isothermal helicase-dependent amplification (HDA) to detect and differentiate between these viruses. Swabs from cutaneous and mucocutaneous lesions should be submitted in viral transport medium (VTM) or universal transport medium (UTM). The laboratory has phased out the use of the Hologic Panther for HSV-1 and HSV-2 detection.

Holiday Schedule

The laboratory will be closed on the following days:

Friday December 24—Christmas

Friday December 31—New Year's

Monday January 17—Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Questions?

Please contact the Laboratory Director by phone at 805-781-5512 or email at gmmiller@co.slo.ca.us.