

Process Improvement on Respiratory Specimens for Culture

Audience: Internal and/or External Clients
Issuing Division: Division of Microbiology
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A random quality audit recently performed by the Microbiology Laboratory on endotracheal aspirates and bronchoalveolar washings demonstrated a very high rate of oral contamination with epithelial cells (35%), bringing the clinical significance of the culture results into question.

Effective Monday May 6, 2019, all respiratory specimens submitted for bacterial culture (sputum, tracheal aspirate, ETT, bronchial washing/bronchoalveolar lavage) will be assessed for quality using the Gram stain results. Specimens with low neutrophil counts combined with evidence of oral contamination (epithelial cells) will not be cultured and the following comment will be indicated in the patient report:

“This specimen will not be processed further as the microscopic exam shows epithelial cells with minimal inflammation. Culture may represent bacterial colonization and/or oropharyngeal contamination. If appropriate, please send a fresh specimen.”

Please note that the quality assessment will only apply to bacterial culture requests. Additional test requests (TB, viral studies, fungal culture, etc.), will be processed as requested.

If you have any concerns please contact Dr. Kevin Katz (Head of Microbiology) at extension 4549 or Laura Baillie (Supervisor) at extension 2536. Please disseminate as you see appropriate.

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