SLO Public Health Laboratory Bulletin

February 2009

San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory Official Commissioning

On March 1, 2009 the San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory officially begins operations as a commissioned Level B (reference or confirmatory) laboratory of the Laboratory Response Network (LRN).

The SLO Public Health Laboratory is now recognized by the California Department of Public Health Emergency Preparedness Office as a fully functional confirmatory laboratory, capable of accepting and confirming the agents of anthrax, plague, tularemia, brucellosis, melioidosis, glanders, and the toxins, ricin and staphylococcal enterotoxin B.

This responsibility means that hospital and clinical reference laboratories of the San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, performing the role of sentinel laboratories can submit specimens and culture isolates that cannot ruled out as agents of these infections and intoxications. Other diagnostic laboratories, such as agricultural and veterinary diagnostic laboratories within the same tri-county jurisdiction, may also submit specimens and culture isolates that cannot be ruled out as one of these agents. Specimens and isolates must be shipped or carried by courier to the SLO PH Laboratory according to federal shipping and hamdling requirements.

Also, with the prior approval of local Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, environmental specimens, including powders and swabs of environmental surfaces and other objects, can be submitted by law enforcement, Hazmat teams and other first responders for LRN testing for agents of bioterrorism

For more information, contact Dr Jim Beebe at 805-781-5512

Syphilis Serology Screening Change- March 2009.

During March the San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory will return to the use of the Rapid Plasma Reagin (RPR) for primary screening of serum specimens for detection of Treponema pallidum infections (syphilis).

This change is prompted by several factors including the documented superior sensitivity of the RPR test, as well as the ease of performance in the laboratory. When a reactive result is obtained, titration testing of the serum specimen to determine the level of the reaginic antibody present and a supplemental specific confirmatory test, the TP-PA (Treponema pallidum particle agglutination test) will be performed and reported.

The SLO Public Health Laboratory will continue to offer the VDRL for testing of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) specimens for the diagnosis of neurosyphilis and special diagnostic situations--- such as a patient with a documented pre-existing VDRL titer being monitored for effectiveness of therapy.

Continue to mark the “VDRL” check box on your requisition to request syphilis screening . During March 2009, reports will change with the replacement of the VDRL screening test with the RPR test. CSF specimens will continue to be tested by the VDRL method, as the RPR test is not appropriate for CSF testing.

The laboratory can accommodate requests for serum VDRL test in special situations such as the monitoring of therapy. For example mark on the requisition “ VDRL test required – previous VDRL titer 1:16” or call the laboratory 781-5507.