

Using Labs Wisely

During Global Blood Tube and Other Resource Shortages

COVID-19 has put extraordinary strain on laboratory medicine in Canada due to **critical shortages** in blood tubes, devices, and lab staffing. The current shortages are forcing health care institutions to take **immediate action to conserve tubes and supplies**. Physicians and patients are key partners with the laboratory in preserving supplies for testing where it is needed most.

Before ordering tests, please consider:

- If and how immediate this test result will change patient management.
- Strategies to minimize collections and avoid duplications, e.g., check previous results.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSERVING LAB RESOURCES IN PRIMARY CARE

1

Don't do annual screening blood tests unless directly indicated by the risk profile of the patient. | Family Medicine

DID YOU KNOW that 1 in 20 results for healthy individuals fall outside the reference interval? Testing without an indication provides no clinical value, involves numerous blood tubes, and unexpected abnormal results can lead to unnecessary follow up testing.

2

Don't support repeat test ordering at a frequency that is not backed by evidence. | Medical Laboratory Science

DID YOU KNOW that up to 20% of tests in Canada are repeated too soon after a previous result, and provide little to no change in management or additional clinical information? This significantly affects lab resources and uses precious blood tubes.

3

Don't routinely measure vitamin D in low-risk adults. | Family Medicine

DID YOU KNOW that testing in Canada often requires dedicated instruments, tubes, and lab staff solely for vitamin D testing? Except in rare circumstances, testing is unnecessary and vitamin D supplements can be used without testing.

4

Don't order thyroid function test in asymptomatic patients. | Family Medicine

DID YOU KNOW that an estimated 25% of TSH tests do not conform with ordering guidelines, and result in unnecessary blood draws?

5

Don't request a serum protein electrophoresis in asymptomatic patients in the absence of otherwise unexplained hypercalcemia, renal insufficiency, anemia or lytic bone lesions.

| Medical Biochemistry

DID YOU KNOW that serum protein electrophoresis and immunofixation are labour-intensive tests in the lab, and current practice guidelines do not recommend routine screening in the general population?