



Hepatitis Serology Testing

From 9th May 2016, non-specific requests for “Hepatitis Screening”, “Viral Hepatitis Screen”, “Hepatitis serology”, etc. will only be tested for Hepatitis B and C. Hepatitis A will no longer be tested for when such requests are received.

The vast majority of requests that are received in this format are from patients with chronic low level derangements in liver function tests. Hepatitis A does not present in this fashion and will thus be excluded from this type of request. Requestors are strongly encouraged to specify the particular Hepatitis viruses they wish to test for.

Acute Hepatitis A is a rare disease in New Zealand, with an incidence of approximately 1 per 100,000 population per annum, mostly occurring in returned travellers. Within the laboratory context, Hepatitis A IgM antibody testing is one of our lowest yield serological tests. The ratio of positive results to the number of total requests is below 0.1% (i.e. less than one in a thousand of all such requests is positive for Hepatitis A IgM antibodies).

Testing a population cohort with such a low prevalence of disease creates problems with poor positive predictive value and numerous false positive results. By making the testing more focused, the positive predictive value can be increased.

If Hepatitis A infection is suspected, it should be specifically requested, with the provision of appropriate clinical details.

Michael Addidle
Clinical Microbiologist
Pathology Associates Ltd
Ph: 07 578 7073