

Quality Assurance of Clinical Laboratory Practice Program

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Subject: OAML PROTOCOL FOR SUSPECTED ANTHRAX SPECIMENS

In response to the recent cases of anthrax in the United States, the Ontario Association of Medical Laboratories would like to highlight the following:

1. Physicians should contact their local Medical Officer of Health if they suspect any clinical cases of anthrax or confirmed cases of anthrax exposure.
2. For overt skin infections or febrile illnesses for which the differential diagnosis may include anthrax, it is appropriate to submit one or more of the following to a community laboratory for culture:

- ?? Wound/Eschar swab
- ?? Sputa
- ?? Blood cultures
- ?? Cerebrospinal fluids

These specimens should be collected from symptomatic patients in the usual manner. They should NOT be used as a screening test for exposure. Exudate aspirates or swabs of tissue underlying eschars or vesicles are appropriate for the diagnosis of cutaneous anthrax.

3. Nasal swabs are NOT considered an appropriate diagnostic screening test for suspected anthrax exposure. Physicians should refer to the Fact Sheet issued by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care dated October 15, 2001 available on the Ministry website <http://www.gov.on.ca/health/english/pub/pubhealth/anthrax.html>
4. For additional information and guidance on suspected cases, physicians should contact their local Public Health Units.
5. Investigation of environmental specimens suspected of harbouring anthrax should be referred to the local police.