

## Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Memorandum

To: Health Care Providers and Health Service Directors, Central Zone  
From: Dr. Manal Elnenaei, Division Chief of Clinical Chemistry  
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Ms. Cindy Andrews, Manager Core Laboratory  
Date: April 20, 2023  
Subject: **Discontinuing RBC Folate Testing and Reducing Inappropriate Serum Folate testing**

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Effective May 10, 2023 Nova Scotia Health, Central Zone will no longer offer RBC folate testing and a utilization rule will be applied to serum folate testing.

Referred-out testing for RBC folate will be available to certain specialities via an approval process. Serum folate testing that is clinically required, should have the term 'Do Not Cancel' clearly written next to the test request.

These changes have been made following local stakeholder feedback and are in line with the national 'Using Labs Wisely' collaborative (part of Choosing Wisely Canada), which aims to reduce the overutilization of low value tests. Choosing Wisely Canada does not recommend folate testing in asymptomatic patients and states that:

- folate deficiency is now very rare in Canada, as all white flours are supplemented with folate.
- for most patients at risk of folate deficiency (e.g., malabsorption conditions, alcoholism), it is more practical and economical to treat with multivitamin supplements including folic acid than to test for deficiency.
- the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada recommends universal supplementation for women of reproductive age. Investigations are not required prior to initiating folic acid in women considering pregnancy.
- serum folate levels usually reflect recent ingestion of folate and not true biochemical folate reserves.

**Additional considerations are as follows:**

- A recent audit showed that annual sufficiency rates are around 99% and 98.9% for patients tested for RBC folate and serum folate respectively; only 0.4% of the total were deemed to have significant folate insufficiency.
- Data comparing 100 Canadian organizations has shown that Nova Scotia Health – Central Zone is one of the highest (5%) utilizers of folate testing.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr Manal Elnenaei 902-473-5194 or Dr Andrea Thoni 902-473-6867.