

UK NEQAS Haematology
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14th April 2020 UPDATE

Dear participant,

UK NEQAS Haematology services during the Covid-19 emergency UPDATE

UK NEQAS Haematology is aware that the worsening Covid-19 pandemic is placing huge pressures on health services throughout the world, including our participating laboratories. In line with other UK NEQAS centres, UK NEQAS Haematology has developed a business continuity plan with the objective of maintaining core services, supporting participants and minimising the risk to our staff during this challenging period.

Amendments to distribution schedules

We have reviewed our planned services with our advisors and have agreed to focus on the high throughput, automated tests and those programmes that support the UK national screening programmes. Other services have been compressed or deferred to later in the year, with a small number of cancellations in April and May. Some surveys may be reduced in scope or complexity. These changes will be kept under review and the most up-to-date schedules and information are available on our website (www.ukneqash.org).

To summarise for the next few months:

- April 2020:**
- FBC, ADLC and Abnormal Haemoglobins as scheduled
 - Newborn Sickle Screening as scheduled
 - Hb only, Plasma Viscosity are cancelled
- May 2020:**
- FBC and Retic counting as scheduled
 - G6PD is cancelled but additional specimens will be supplied in later distributions
 - Blood Films for Morphology is cancelled
 - Blood Films for Parasites and Malaria RDT deferred to July
 - Newborn Sickle Screening as scheduled
 - Hb only, Plasma viscosity as scheduled
- June 2020:**
- FBC, ADLC and Abnormal Haemoglobins as scheduled
 - Blood Films for Morphology and Manual Differential deferred to July
 - Newborn Sickle Screening as scheduled
 - Hb only, Plasma Viscosity as scheduled

Handling UK NEQAS Haematology specimen packages

Our specimens are prepared and packed in facilities that do not process patients' samples. The material is either commercially produced or prepared in-house from blood for transfusion. Blood films and dried blood spots (dbs) are from our libraries of cases prepared before the Covid-19 pandemic. With the exception of blood films and dbs, the specimens may be cleaned on receipt in the same way as patients' samples. Specimen packages should be handled with the same precautions as all other goods received in the post room and laboratory.

Amendments to deadlines for return of results

We understand that participants may not be able to return results by the closing date. We ask that you store the specimens as described in the instruction sheets and, as far as possible, test material by the closing date so that it is tested in the best and most stable condition. We wish to avoid penalising any participant for circumstances beyond their control and will be able to offer the following flexibility in the return of results, depending on the nature of the assay material and the turnaround time on reports:

1. FBC programme

Specimens are stable for up to one week after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

2. **ADLC and NRBC programmes**
Specimens are stable until the expiry date printed on the vials. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
3. **Reticulocyte count programme**
Specimens should be analysed up to 4 days after the closing date, i.e. test by the Friday after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
4. **ESR (including ESX) programme**
Specimens are stable until the expiry date printed on the vials. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
5. **Hb only programme**
Specimens may be tested up to one day after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
6. **Blood Films for Morphology, Manual Diff and Parasites, and Cytochemistry programmes**
Specimens are stable. Results will be accepted without penalty up to 2 weeks after the closing date.
7. **Rapid Diagnostic Test for Malaria**
Specimens are stable until reconstituted. Results will be accepted without penalty up to 2 weeks after the closing date.
8. **Abnormal Haemoglobins programme**
Specimens may be tested up to one day after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
9. **Newborn Sickle Screening (using Dried Blood Spots) programme**
Specimens are stable. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
10. **Red Cell Enzymes (G6PD) screening and assay programme**
Specimens may be tested up to one day after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
11. **DNA Diagnostics for Haemoglobinopathies programme**
Specimens are stable. Results will be accepted without penalty up to two weeks after the closing date.
12. **Digital Morphology programme**
The cases will open and close to schedule.

You may decide not to return results at all, because a particular test has been suspended from your repertoire or you have chosen not to test EQA specimens as part of your emergency response during the pandemic. If you are unable to return results, you can avoid a non-participation penalty by submitting a 'blank' return, i.e. one without any data but with the reason in the general comments box.

Amendment to reporting and performance monitoring

The delay to the receipt of a proportion of results may mean that data processing and reporting are delayed beyond the published report dates. If a report is likely to be more than two weeks late, we will issue an interim analysis so that participants can assess their performance. We will concentrate on the follow-up of potentially serious analytical performance concerns as soon as they become apparent.

Contacting UK NEQAS Haematology

In compliance with the UK Government's emergency regulations, as many of our team as possible are working from home. We are unable to answer the phone routinely and ask that you use email (ghadmin@ukneqas.org.uk for administrative queries and haem@ukneqas.org.uk for scientific queries).

Thank you to all our healthcare colleagues for the astounding work you are doing.

Keep safe.

With best regards,



Barbara De la Salle, PhD
Director, UK NEQAS Haematology