

Introduction

Laboratory professionals are well aware of the many changes that are taking place in health care today and these changes are not just appearing in the private sector. Many of the testing services previously performed at the State Health Laboratory were transferred to the University of Nebraska Medical Center this past summer. Affected tests include those utilized or administered by State Health programs for HIV surveillance, sexually transmitted diseases, and child health. Testing that relates to water quality, environmental testing or agricultural applications has remained in Lincoln. The only significant change for most clinical laboratories is the address to which bacterial isolates should be sent for referral to the CDC. By consolidating testing services with those already available at the UNMC, considerable cost savings are possible due to reduced reagent expenditure and volume efficiencies. Nebraska has taken a leadership position in this effort and several states are considering similar moves. Some states such as Iowa and Wisconsin have operated the public health laboratories under the auspices of their state universities for years, whereas only recently the state of Nevada reorganized it's public health laboratory within the university system. While these efforts at economizing are worthy, much concern has been raised about whether our public health system is prepared to deal effectively with the next major epidemic. One potential epidemic that could have a significant impact is the Asian influenza A virus strain associated with birds (see accompanying story on page 4).

The purpose of this newsletter is to communicate timely information regarding laboratory testing to hospital and clinic laboratorians. We also want to convey our willingness to discuss or consult on current issues as they arise in the community .

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