

January 2007

Acid-fast Bacilli (AFB): Change in Reporting the Enumeration of AFB in Smears

To Health Care Providers:

All smears are prepared from concentrated specimens and are stained by Auramine-Rhodamine fluorescent stain. Smears are performed on all specimens submitted for mycobacteriology, with the exception of blood and urine specimens.

AFB smear reports are issued within 24hrs of specimen receipt at the laboratory.

Currently, the Ontario Public Health Laboratories (OPHL) enumeration protocol uses a “descriptive” terminology (scarce, moderate, and numerous) to report the quantity of AFB observed in a smear.

As of March 1st 2007, the OPHL will be using the internationally accepted semi-quantitative terminology and protocol for enumerating AFB observed in smears. The table below indicates the approximate equivalences between the current and new enumeration methods:

Comparison of Enumeration Methods:

<u>Number of AFB seen in smear</u>	<u>Current Method</u>	<u>New Method</u>
None	No AFB seen	No AFB seen
3-9/smear	Scarce	Few
1-9/ten fields	Moderate	1+
1-9/ field	Moderate	2+
10-90/ field	Numerous	3+
> 90/ field	Numerous	4+

Note: - field is one microscopic field at 250 X magnification
 - for smears where only one or two AFB are observed, a repeat smear will be performed. If no AFB can be seen on repeat, then the smear will be reported as negative.

For Further Information:

- Call the TB Laboratory at 416-235-5928
- Your local Public Health Laboratory
- OPHL HELPLINE at 1-800-640-7221
- Ministry website at www.health.gov.on.ca