

**Scottish *E. coli* O157/STEC Reference Laboratory**  
**Department of Laboratory Medicine**

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Dear Colleagues,

**Submission of Repeat Samples to SERL for STEC Screening**

A recent audit has identified that a large number of repeat faecal samples are being submitted to SERL for STEC screening by PCR. A small proportion of these are follow- up clearance samples from patients infected with non- O157 or atypical STEC in line with current national guidance<sup>1</sup>. However, the majority of repeat samples are from patients who have not tested positive for STEC during their illness. At times, 3 or 4 faecal samples taken on the same day, or within a 24h period, are received from the same patient.

The current HPN STEC guidance does not give an indication of the number of samples to be submitted to SERL for more sensitive testing. However, the audit has confirmed that the first faecal sample taken after the onset of bloody diarrhoea is likely to be the sample testing positive, and subsequent samples are likely to test negative as the organism is shed with the faeces.

Accordingly, the guidance for faecal submission to SERL has been clarified:

**Faeces from known non- O157 or atypical STEC positive cases – for clearance purposes:**

No change to guidance - repeat faecal samples to be submitted to SERL as advised by the local Health Protection Team.

**Faeces from patients with a recent diagnosis of HUS and first faecal sample negative for STEC at SERL:**

No change - repeat faecal samples to be submitted to SERL if negative at diagnostic laboratory.

**Faeces from people who first tested negative as an asymptomatic contact of an STEC case but have subsequently developed symptoms:**

No change – a further sample should be submitted if symptoms develop in a contact of a case of STEC infection, with appropriate clinical details on the laboratory request form.

**Faeces from patients who have already tested negative by faecal PCR for STEC during an episode of illness:**

SERL will process repeat faecal samples taken at least 2 days apart. **PLEASE DO NOT SEND** repeat samples taken within 2 days of the previous negative sample.

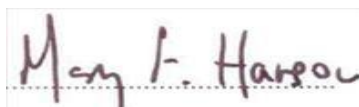
SERL will closely monitor faecal submission, and from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019, repeat faecal samples taken on the same day or the subsequent day will not be processed. These will be reported as: **“Sample not processed: negative faecal sample, taken within 48 hours of this sample, already reported for this patient”**.

We would be grateful if you can monitor your submission of samples to SERL to ensure continued compliance with this request.

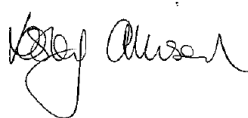
If you have any questions or would like to discuss this in more detail, please contact Dr Lesley Allison, in the first instance.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Mary L. Hanson". The signature is written on a white background with a faint horizontal line underneath.

Dr Mary Hanson,  
Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Allison". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr Lesley Allison,  
Deputy Director/Principal Scientist

<sup>1</sup>[https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2032/documents/1\\_SHPN-Guidance-Ecoli-shiga-STECC.pdf](https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2032/documents/1_SHPN-Guidance-Ecoli-shiga-STECC.pdf)