Dear Colleagues,

As we move towards the reopening of many of our economies and embracing the “new normal”, we at the CariPHLN Secretariat take this opportunity to recognize the unwavering dedication of laboratory professionals across the Caribbean who continue to form part of the frontline for the COVID-19 response in addition to routine clinical and other laboratory testing.

In **Bulletin #4**, we highlight the WHO Laboratory Assessment Tool for laboratories implementing COVID-19 testing, a new partnership with the International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA) and see how our partners have been supporting the regional response.

**Laboratory Assessment Tool for COVID-19**

The Secretariat strongly recommends that each laboratory seeking to implement COVID-19 testing conduct a self-assessment using the tool which comes in the form of an Excel file that enables automatic calculations of module indicators. The summary generated includes a gap analysis which allows the laboratory to target weak areas for direct improvement and lobby for required resources.

According to the WHO website, this Laboratory Assessment Tool (LAT) is specifically designed to assess capacities of existing laboratories which have implemented or aim to implement COVID-19 virus testing. It addresses both core capacities of a laboratory and specificities related to COVID-19 virus testing. Download here [https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/laboratory-guidance](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/laboratory-guidance)

**CARPHA Formalizes Partnership with IFBA**

CARPHA was recently granted Observer Status with the International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA) which is a not-for-profit non-governmental organization of regional and national Biosafety Associations from all areas of the world. This new partnership provides an avenue for regional and national laboratory safety and biosafety officers to collaborate with others in the global community on mutual areas of interest in support of strengthening laboratory biosafety and biosecurity policies, practices and professional development. Click to read the announcement [https://internationalbiosafety.org/the-ifba-welcomes-new-partnership-with-the-caribbean-public-health-agency-carpha/](https://internationalbiosafety.org/the-ifba-welcomes-new-partnership-with-the-caribbean-public-health-agency-carpha/)
CDC Online Resources to Build Capacities

Since the start of the pandemic the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been supporting prevention, preparedness, and response efforts globally, in partnership with public health agencies, health ministry counterparts, and multilateral and non-governmental organizations worldwide. The Caribbean Regional Office (CRO) is focused specifically on the response across this region. Activities are designed to enhance COVID-19 response capabilities and simultaneously continue to build longer-term, sustainable capacity for response to highly communicable diseases in the future. So far, they have committed $3.4 million in resources to Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, Barbados and CARPHA to provide support on emergency and laboratory operations, infection prevention and control, community engagement and disease surveillance.

To assist with continuing education and create sustainable opportunities for Laboratorians, we are pleased to share several online training resources, which can be accessed by the public at any time. See Webinars for more links:

❖ **Basic molecular biology: PCR and real time PCR** - This is designed for public health and clinical laboratory staff, persons interested in PCR and real-time PCR techniques.  

❖ **Sten Westgard and Wayne Dimech**, two world-renowned experts, are providing information on COVID 19 testing:  
- **Testing for COVID-19**  
- **Maintaining Quality of Testing in a State of Emergency**  
  [https://www.westgard.com/covid-19-maintaining-quality.html#covid19#labsarevital](https://www.westgard.com/covid-19-maintaining-quality.html#covid19#labsarevital)

NEW! PAHO Technical Document on the Extended Use and Reuse of Respirators

On June 10, 2020 PAHO released the “**Technical and regulatory aspects of the extended use, reuse, and reprocessing of respirators during shortages**”, which provides guidance on the technical specifications and quality criteria to be used for the selection of N95 respirators as seen in Table 1.


The following considerations were highlighted when seeking to optimize usage during shortages –

- Extended use is recommended over reuse of the N95 respirator
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has suggested the possibility of the extended use by the same individual for up to 6 hours
- Respirator reprocessing methods with the most evidence of efficacy to date include saturated steam, UVC radiation, and gas plasma or vaporized hydrogen peroxide sterilization, however, no method should be adopted without prior local validation testing in the health facility.

Please click on the link below to access the publication:  
CMLF Supporting the COVID-19 response

It took COVID-19 to teach us, perhaps, one of the most striking lessons of the pandemic: the urgent need for scaling up testing to identify those infected, to prevent further spread and reduce harm.

Through online training, CMLF has assisted countries to ensure quality management systems for accurate and reliable COVID-19 results.

The Foundation has provided critical information for Ministries of Health, laboratories, and health care providers to help guide their decisions. This guidance has addressed options for, and benefits of COVID-19 testing to identify persons infected who require treatment and for surveillance of those who may have been infected and recovered.

In addition, to ensure that other critical regional health interventions continue in light of severe supply chain disruptions globally, CMLF continues to collect and share data with partners on regional HIV and STI reagent stocks to ensure that HIV and STI diagnostic, treatment and care services continue in this COVID-19 era. CMLF also provided guidance to countries through the PANCAP webinar series, for adapting rapid test site facilities and processes to allow continuation of HIV and syphilis rapid testing at health sector and community testing sites.

Webinars and Online Courses

**CDC**
- Laboratory Continuity of Operations (COOP) Planning Course
- Fundamentals of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in Clinical Laboratories

**Registration Link to both courses:**
https://www.train.org/cdctrain/

**ASLM**
- [https://aslm.org/resource-centre/?projects=&resource_type=echo-session&topics=covid-19](https://aslm.org/resource-centre/?projects=&resource_type=echo-session&topics=covid-19)

**COVID-19 Resource Centre**

**Laboratory testing:**
- CARPHA: [https://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus](https://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus)
- FINDD: [https://www.finddx.org/covid-19/](https://www.finddx.org/covid-19/)

**Laboratory Biosafety and Biosecurity guidelines:**
- WHO: [https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331138](https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331138)

National AIDS Programme (NAP) HIV Testing Site with COVID-19 improvements in Antigua and Barbuda