Effective 12/27/23, an Ask at Order Entry (AOE) question will be added to the order for AFB Culture/Smear, Other (LAB2513). This is being done to guide care teams when making decisions regarding whether or not a patient can be removed from airborne isolation when suspected infectious pulmonary tuberculosis is in the differential. The question asks if the testing is to rule out M. tuberculosis. If answered as “yes”, the Microbiology lab will perform a PCR test to detect this organism in sputum samples.

The Vermont Department of Health has been involved with the decision to test patient samples even with a negative direct AFB smear. The PCR assay has improved sensitivity for detecting M. tuberculosis when compared to the AFB smear alone. This test is not indicated for other Mycobacterium species. A culture is the best method for detecting NTM organisms.

For questions or concerns regarding this alert, please contact UVMMC Laboratory Customer Service at (802)847-5121 and ask to speak with Microbiology.