

Good Laboratory Decisions for Better Patient Care

Selecting and Using Reference Laboratories

What is a Reference Laboratory?

By definition a reference laboratory is one that receives a specimen from another laboratory and performs testing on that specimen. Hospital and clinic laboratories have a selected list of tests that are performed on site. The decision as to which tests are performed depends on the size of the hospital or clinic that the laboratory serves, the type of patients that are seen, the availability of testing personnel, the laboratory instrumentation required for specific testing, IT and EMR capacity, and the cost of performing the test. The laboratory medical director makes this decision, in conjunction with laboratory and administrative staff and medical staff.

For tests not performed on site a reference laboratory (or laboratories) must be selected. Reference laboratories may also be utilized for unusual test result confirmation, during times when instruments are undergoing service or for specialized tests which are under patent or only performed in limited laboratories. Reference laboratories are usually private, commercial businesses that perform high volumes of testing. Some reference labs are in affiliation with medical centers or universities.