



COLA PATIENT SAFETY PROGRAM 2011: Reporting “Panic” Results

COLA began the COLA Patient Safety Program in 2008 with the intent of focusing on areas in laboratory medicine that are found to have high error rates and significant impact on patient safety. Through this program, COLA will identify an existing COLA criterion or create a new criterion as the patient safety goal for each year, and provide education on good laboratory practices for implementation of that goal. The program has also been integrated into the COLA survey process.

COLA Patient Safety Goals

2008	Improving patient identification
2009	Improving specimen identification & labeling
2010	Improving tracking of specimens throughout the testing process

For 2011, our goal addresses the post-analytic phase of the testing process – reporting test results. The COLA Patient Safety Goal for 2011 is:

**APM 18: Does the procedure manual include for each test, where applicable:
How the laboratory reports results (including panic results)?**

What needs to happen after the test result is generated to ensure that the result gets to the right person in a timely manner?

First, every laboratory needs a procedure that describes how the laboratory provides results to the ordering practitioner, including how to report highly abnormal results promptly so that potentially life-saving patient care actions can be initiated.

Include these details in your procedure for reporting test results:

- What information is included in the report
- Descriptions of how reports are:
 - Created
 - Distributed
 - Maintained for future reference
- Procedures for “stat” reporting, or when the patient is waiting for results
- Tests that require urgent action when significantly abnormal (panic) results are obtained
 - For each test, identify the range of abnormal values that require urgent action (for example, glucose values <50 or >400 mg/dl)
 - Describe what additional steps are taken when reporting a panic result to the ordering practitioner

Procedures related to panic result reporting are especially important for patient safety. Panic results are abnormal laboratory test result values with results so far outside the normal

range that immediate attention is required. These results, also called “alert” or “action” values, could possibly be life-threatening for the patient and must be relayed to the ordering practitioner as soon as possible, following your written procedure. The procedure should include:

- A list of panic values for the tests your lab performs (the lab director and clinical consultant can work together to establish panic values, based on your patient population)
- How the lab ensures that the individual ordering the test is promptly notified of a panic result
- Who to notify, including what to do if that person is not immediately reachable
- The expected timeframe for notifications
- How to document notifications

When calling panic results, begin by asking the recipient to write it down, and always ask the person to read back the patient name and secondary identifier, test, and result to confirm that everything was heard and written down correctly.

You may wish to create a script for staff to use when reporting panic results by phone. This will ensure that everyone making such a call handles it in the same way and relays the results in a consistent manner.

When reporting panic results, always document the notification, including:

- Who was notified
- The patient’s name and secondary identifier
- The test and the results
- Date and time of notification
- Method of notification (phone, hand

delivered report, etc.)

You may wish to create a log specifically for documenting panic result notifications.

Periodically review your list of panic values to see if it needs adjusting for your patient population or clinicians’ needs. If you add a new test to your test menu, determine if it needs to have panic values established.

Train all staff on the panic value reporting procedure and ensure that everyone follows the procedure as written.

Think about this important patient safety goal and take steps to ensure compliance in your laboratory.