Updates to Antimicrobial Resistance Laboratory Network (ARLN) Testing of Carbapenem-Resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* (CRAB) Isolates

Date: May 28, 2026

Public Health Message Type: ☐ Alert ☐ Advisory ☒ Update ☐ Information

Intended Audience: ☒ All public health partners ☒ Healthcare providers ☒ Infection preventionists ☒ Local health departments ☐ Schools/childcare centers ☐ACOs ☐ Animal health professionals ☒ Other: Reference Laboratories

Summary

- Effective June 1, 2026, carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* (CRAB) isolates submitted to the New Jersey Public Health and Environmental Laboratory (NJPHEL) Antimicrobial Resistance Laboratory Network (ARLN) will no longer routinely undergo oxacillinase (OXA) polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing.
    - Over 90% of CRAB isolates carry an OXA gene (e.g., OXA-23) and should generally be considered OXA-positive.
- CRAB submission and reporting criteria remain unchanged (see "Resources").
- CRAB isolates submitted to NJPHEL ARLN will continue to undergo species identification via MALDI-TOF, antimicrobial susceptibility testing, and real-time PCR (RT-PCR) for the "Big Five" carbapenemases (i.e., NDM, KPC, VIM, IMP and OXA-48) via Cepheid and/or Streck panels.

Background

Carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* (CRAB) is a highly prevalent healthcare-associated pathogen in New Jersey. More than 90% of CRAB isolates carry an oxacillinase (OXA) gene that produces enzymes that break down the antibiotic oxacillin. In New Jersey, CRAB isolates most frequently carry blaOXA-23, blaOXA-51, and blaOXA-24/40. Therefore, consider all CRAB isolates collected in New Jersey as OXA-positive, regardless of testing.

Update

Effective June 1, 2026, NJPHEL will discontinue routine use of the OXA polymerase chain reaction (PCR) panel on CRAB isolates submitted for further testing. Use of the OXA PCR panel will be restricted to CRAB isolates collected from pediatric patients ages 21 years and younger.

At this time, there are no changes to the current criteria for reporting cases and submitting CRAB isolates to NJDOH (see "Resources"). NJPHEL will continue to conduct the following test methods on CRAB isolates submitted for further testing:

- Species identification via MALDI-TOF and/or Vitek-2
- Antimicrobial susceptibility testing, including sulbactam-durlobactam via Sensititre™ and cefiderocol via disk diffusion
- RT-PCR for the "Big Five" carbapenemases (i.e., NDM, KPC, VIM, IMP and OXA-48) via Cepheid and/or Streck panels

Recommendations for Clinical and Reference Laboratories:

- Continue submitting CRAB isolates to NJPHEL as outlined in the current submission and reporting process document (see "Resources").

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

- Patients identified to have CRAB should be considered OXA-positive.
    - In acute care settings, these patients should be placed and maintained on Contact Precautions.
    - In skilled nursing facilities, these patients should be placed and maintained on Enhanced Barrier Precautions, unless Contact Precautions are otherwise indicated (see "Resources").
- Continue to report single cases of CRAB to NJDOH Communicable Disease Service (CDS) as outlined in the current submission and reporting process document (see "Resources").
- Report suspected or confirmed outbreaks of CRAB to your local health department and NJDOH CDS.

Contact Information:

NJDOH Communicable Disease Service:

- CDS HAI/AR Unit Email: DOH.CDS.HAIAR.EPI@doh.nj.gov
- NJDOH Communicable Disease Service, (609) 826-5964 during business hours

NJDOH Public Health and Environmental Laboratory:

- NJPHEL ARLN Lab Email: phel.arlnlab@doh.nj.gov

Resources

- NJDOH *Acinetobacter* Submission Criteria and Reporting Instructions: https://www.nj.gov/health/phel/documents/Microbiology/ARLN/Acinetobacter%20Isolate%20Submission%20and%20Reporting%20to%20NJDOH.pdf
- NJDOH Carbapenemase-Producing Organism Result Reporting Instructions: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/ar/njdoh_cpo_reporting_process.pdf
- PHEL Specimen Submission Instructions: https://www.nj.gov/health/phel/documents/Client%20Services/Shipping%20Specimens%20to%20PHEL.pdf
- NJDOH Antimicrobial Resistance Webpage: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ar.shtml
- NJDOH Enhanced Barrier Precautions in Nursing Homes Algorithm: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/hai/EBP_in_Nursing_Homes_Algorithm.pdf