
May 3, 2024

Dear Local Health Officer,

This letter documents the relationship between your health department, the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH), and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to respond to Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) Standards and Measures Version 2022, whether your health department is applying for reaccreditation now or in the future.

The WSLH is Wisconsin's public, environmental and occupational health laboratory. Established in 1903 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and administratively affiliated with the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, the WSLH develops and provides essential public health laboratory support to communities, agencies, and private health providers consistent with the public health goals of the state. DHS is the state public health agency whose mission is to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin.

The role of WSLH in the state public health system, including its relationship with local health departments, DHS and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is outlined in state statutes:

- 36.25(11)(b)
(b) The laboratory shall provide complete laboratory services in the areas of water quality, air quality, public health and contagious diseases for appropriate state agencies, and may perform examinations for licensed physicians, veterinarians, local health officers, as defined in s.250.01(5), and resource management officials as may be necessary for the prevention and control of those diseases and environmental hazards which cause concern for public health and environmental quality.
- 36.25(11)(d)
(d) The laboratory shall be operated to furnish a complete laboratory service to the department of health services and the department of natural resources in the areas of water quality, air quality, public health and contagious diseases and to make available to the system, the department of health services and the department of natural resources such facilities for teaching in the fields of public health and environmental protection as may be derived from such a laboratory.

DHS has long recognized the critical responsibility of local health departments in investigating the causes of illness in their communities. In support of that responsibility, DHS works with WSLH to extend its laboratory capacity under 36.25(11)(d) to local health departments. In addition to extending its laboratory capacity, the WSLH also provides surveillance data to the public health system. Laboratory costs to meet investigation needs described in PHAB measures 2.1.2 and 2.1.3A are covered through the laboratory's statutory budget allocation intended to meet DHS needs.



Below are the relevant PHAB standards regarding local health departments and the WSLH:

Measure 2.1.1A RD 1: The WSLH provides laboratory-based surveillance data for local and tribal health departments in collaboration with Wisconsin's clinical laboratories. The primary focus is on virus surveillance, along enteric bacterial surveillance, and mycobacteriology surveillance. The provision of these services is outlined on the WSLH website - <http://www.slh.wisc.edu/wcln-surveillance/surveillance/>.

Contact information (including the phone number for the WSLH's 24/7/365 emergency pager) is updated and listed on the WSLH home page (<http://www.slh.wisc.edu/>) and the WSLH Contacts web page (<http://www.slh.wisc.edu/about/contact/>).

As a partner in the public health system, WSLH provides training to laboratories and other surveillance sites that address general surveillance requirements or disease/condition-specific requirements. Surveillance data is shared with local and tribal health departments through the WSLH website (<http://www.slh.wisc.edu/wcln-surveillance/surveillance/>) and via an emailed bi-weekly update to which local and tribal health departments can subscribe. This update is also posted on the WSLH website at <http://www.slh.wisc.edu/wcln-surveillance/surveillance/>.

Measure 2.1.3A RD 2: As part of local health department investigations of disease outbreaks, communicable disease follow-up, health care associated infections, and environmental public health hazards, the WSLH will provide laboratory testing and services to assist in the identification of disease pathogens and environmental contaminants. Testing capacity is provided directly to local health departments to use subject to their discretion for most types of tests. For some types of tests, additional coordination with DHS and WSLH is necessary based on programmatic and logistical requirements. WSLH staff collaborate in the investigations as needed with DHS and DNR staff.

Measures 2.1.2A RD 1: The WSLH maintains a 24/7/365 emergency answering service (608-263-3280) for use by local health departments, state agency staff, and others. The phone number is listed on the WSLH home page (<http://www.slh.wisc.edu/>) and the WSLH Contacts web page (<http://www.slh.wisc.edu/about/contact/>). WSLH staff can provide testing and analytical services during off-hours in emergency situations. Decisions as to whether to provide off-hours testing are made in consultation with the local health department and DHS. Instructions for collection of clinical specimens for communicable disease testing can be found on our website (<http://www.slh.wisc.edu/clinical/diseases/supplies/>). The WSLH provides for a free courier service for clinical specimens that are approved for emergency testing by DHS. (NOTE: Federal law requires submitting agencies to have staff that are trained and certified to submit clinical specimens. It is the responsibility of the local health department to provide their staff with training and certify the staff. The WSLH does not provide this.) The WSLH also provides collection kits and instructions for environmental samples. Call 800-442-4618 Monday-Friday 7:45 AM – 4:30 PM or call the after-hours emergency answering service at 608-263-3280.

In addition to the items outlined above, WSLH staff also provide on-going technical assistance as needed to local health departments. The WSLH also provides training to local health department staff via presentations at the New Public Health Employee Orientation sponsored by DHS, and by including local health department

staff in WI Clinical Laboratory Network regional meetings and webinars. The WSLH also is a state agency partner to the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards Laboratory Section/Local Public Health Laboratory Network that includes staff from the 20+ local health department laboratories in Wisconsin.

WSLH and DHS staff value our relationships with your staff, and we are proud to collaborate to provide your department with vital laboratory testing so you can best respond to the needs of your community and the people you serve.

Sincerely,



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