Laboratory Guidelines For Acute Diarrhea

Suggested Physician Ordering Plan for the Laboratory Examination of Stool Specimens

Washington State Department of Health Clinical Laboratory Advisory Council

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FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY
The individual clinician is in the best position to determine which tests are most appropriate for a particular patient.

Acute Diarrhea (duration ≤ 7 days)

Is patient elderly or immunocompromised?

Is there evidence of an inflammatory response by the GI tract?

Stool Culture

Findings

Not inflammatory

Inflammatory

History

Water stools

Frequent small volume stools

Large volume stools

Bloody stools

Minimal or no blood

Abdominal cramping

-fecal WBC

-fecal lactoferrin

-fecal blood

+ fecal WBC

+ fecal lactoferrin

+ fecal blood

Lab Tests

- Rule out medication induced
- Rule out Giardia lamblia by Giardia antigen test

Treat symptoms and observe (See also chronic diarrhea)

- Shigella
- Salmonella
- Campylobacter
- Yersinia*
- Vibrio*
- Enterohemorrhagic E.coli

* Notify lab if suspected

Stool Ova & Parasite Exam

Giardia/Cryptosporidium Immunoassay

Entamoeba histolytica Strongyloides stercoralis

EIA or stain for Microsporidium

C. difficile test

Microsporidium

Colonoscopy

Treat C. difficile

20-40% of cases no cause is found

Ulcereative Colitis
Crohn's Disease
Mesenteric Ischemia
Radiation Colitis

References: