



DATE: June 29, 2015

TO: EMH Reference Laboratory Clients

SUBJECT: RBC Folate

As of July 13th, 2015, the **Laboratory will no longer offer RBC folate testing**. Studies have shown that serum folate concentrations provide equivalent clinical information to RBC folate in almost all clinical scenarios, resulting in routine ordering of RBC folate to be no longer warranted.¹ In addition, the **“Vitamin B12/Serum Folate” test panel will no longer be offered**. However, **serum folate and vitamin B12 will continue to be offered as stand alone tests**.

In addition, despite its continued availability, physicians are asked to **reconsider use of serum folate** testing moving forward. True **folate deficiency** in the current era of FDA-mandated folic acid supplementation is **exceedingly rare**. An internal study performed by EMH Laboratory demonstrated only six low serum folate results among a total of 2,699 tests performed during 2014 (**0.2% incidence**), results that parallel reports from outside institutions.²⁻⁴ Also, studies have shown that even when low folate levels are identified, less than half of these patients are given folate replacement.^{2,3}

Investigation of megaloblastic anemia should preferentially be initiated with vitamin B12 testing instead of folate. **In the absence of B12 deficiency, it is more cost effective to simply supplement with folic acid** rather than routinely test and monitor a patient's folate status, similar to other nutritional deficiencies such as vitamin D.

For more information or questions, please contact EMH Reference Laboratory Client Services at 331-221-4422.

References:

- ¹ [Galloway M, Rushworth L: Red cell or serum folate? Results from the National Pathology Alliance benchmarking review. J Clin Pathol. 2003 Dec;56\(12\):924-926.](#)
- ² [Latif T, Hsi ED, Rybicki LA, Adelstein DJ: Is there a role for folate determinations in current clinical practice in the USA? Clin. Lab. Haem. 2004;26:379-383. \(Please contact Dr. Candel for copy of reference.\)](#)
- ³ [Robinson AR, Mladenovic J: Lack of Clinical Utility of Folate Levels in the Evaluation of Macrocytosis or Anemia. Am J Med. 2001;110:88-90.](#)
- ⁴ [Shojania AM, von Kuster K: Ordering folate assays is no longer justified for investigation of anemias, in folic acid fortified countries. BMC Research Notes 2010;3:22.](#)