Memorandum – Micro #257

To: UNC Health Attending Physicians, Faculty Practice Physicians, Housestaff, Clinical Nurse Coordinators, Department Heads and Supervisors

From: Melissa B. Miller, PhD
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Date: July 13, 2026

Subject: Meningitis/Encephalitis Panel

Effective July 20, 2026, the UNC Medical Center Clinical Molecular Microbiology Laboratory will begin offering a molecular multiplex assay that rapidly identifies multiple organisms associated with meningitis and encephalitis. The ME panel is FDA-cleared and will identify the organisms below. The ME panel should not replace routine microbiologic diagnostics, such as bacterial culture, HSV PCR, and Cryptococcal Antigen test. It should not be used for CSF obtained from shunts, nor to monitor response to therapy.

Organisms		
Bacteria	**Viruses**	**Yeast**
Escherichia coli K1	Cytomegalovirus (CMV)	*Cryptococcus (C. neoformans/gattii)*¶
Haemophilus influenzae	Enterovirus	
Listeria monocytogenes	Herpes simplex virus (HSV) 1±	
Neisseria meningitidis	HSV-2±	
Streptococcus agalactiae	Human herpes virus 6 (HHV-6)	
Streptococcus pneumoniae	Human parechovirus	
	Varicella Zoster virus (VZV)	

±False negative results have been reported for HSV. Patients with a suspicion of HSV M/E and a negative HSV panel result should be tested by HSV 1/2 PCR (LAB917).

¶False negative results have been reported for *Cryptococcus.* Patients with a suspicion of cryptococcal meningitis and a negative *Cryptococcus* panel result should be tested for cryptococcal antigen (LAB6011).

See here for additional limitations and known cross-reactivity.

The ME panel is recommended in the following clinical scenarios:
CSF from lumbar puncture (LP) with:
- WBC >10 cells/mm^3 *or* protein >50 mg/dL *or* glucose <40 mg/dL

AND one of the following:
- Pediatric patients < 90 days old

OR
- Patients who received antimicrobials prior to LP and bacterial meningitis is suspected

For all other cases, the test requires infectious diseases or neurology consult/approval.

Additional information can be found on the McLendon Clinical Laboratories website: ME Panel Test Information. Questions not answered by the websites can be directed to the Clinical Microbiology Laboratory at 984-974-1805 or Dr. Melissa Miller at Melissa.Miller@unchealth.unc.edu.