



# THE SCOPE

## Awanui Labs Northern - Pathology news

Editorial: Dr Lesley Overend	Page 1	Online Booking System Expands Across Auckland	Page 5
September School Holiday hours	Page 1	Home Visit Service Update - Same Day Requests	Page 5
Understanding Autoimmune Disease and Serology	Page 2 - 4	Key contacts sheet	Page 6

### Introduction to the Scope September 2025



#### Welcome to the September 2025 Edition of the Scope

This month's issue features an article from Dr Richard Steele, one of our immunopathologists, on the role of serology testing in autoimmune disease. Dr Steele explains when and why to order

an anti-nuclear antibody (ANA) test, highlights areas where testing may be overused, and identifies population groups where it remains underutilised.

We're also pleased to share that the recent issues with ANA, ENA and dsDNA testing have now been resolved.

With the installation of new analysers, we will be able to repatriate the remaining Northern region immunology and infectious serology work previously performed in our Wellington laboratory. In addition, this edition includes several updates from our collection services. We outline our same-day home visit collections service, including its scope and limitations, provide an update on our newly implemented booking system (which is already receiving positive feedback), and share information about school holiday opening hours at selected collection centres. These changes help us support staff annual leave while maintaining efficiency during busy periods.

#### September School Holiday Collection Centre Hours

Awanui Labs Auckland will operate reduced collection centre hours during the September school holidays (20 September – 5 October 2025).

The closures are consistent with those implemented in July and previous school holiday periods.

- Updated opening hours will be displayed on Google and our website.
- Signage will be placed at all centres, with specific notices at locations that will be closed.
- A [Medinz notice](#) and [Lab Update](#) have also been issued to ensure referrers are informed.

The full schedule of holiday hours is available on our website:

[www.awanuilabs.co.nz](http://www.awanuilabs.co.nz).



Autoimmune diseases can be common conditions like thyroiditis and type 1 diabetes or rarer disorders such as vasculitis. They predominantly affect young to middle-aged adults, with a higher prevalence in females.

Key features include:

- Systemic (e.g., SLE, RA) or organ-specific (e.g. adrenal, brain, skin)
- Tissue injury is driven by cellular or humoral autoimmune mechanisms

Autoantibodies are mainly used for diagnosis and in this setting should **ONLY** be ordered where objective clinical features of the disease in question are present.

Autoantibodies are frequently detectable many years before clinically apparent disease but the prognostic value for most is poorly understood as not all people with these autoantibodies will progress to having disease.

Autoantibodies should **NOT** be ordered in asymptomatic patients or as screening tests as this can lead to potential harm to the patient as well as significant costs to the health system. There are rare exceptions such as screening for coeliac disease in type I diabetics.

Specific autoantibodies are used for monitoring in some conditions such as coeliac disease (e.g. anti tissue transglutaminase antibodies), SLE (anti-dsDNA antibodies) and ANCA positive vasculitis (MPO/PR3).

The pathogenesis of autoimmune disease is not fully understood but in general is due to a genetic predisposition with variants mainly affecting components of the immune system. Environmental triggers and exposures are also involved which has led to a dramatic increase in the prevalence of autoimmune disease over the last 50-70 years.

Tissue injury can be due to damage through cell-mediated or antibody-mediated mechanisms. Antibodies can cause direct tissue damage through the formation of immune complexes (for example glomerulonephritis), direct damage or physiological dysfunction, (for example bullous skin disease skin or myasthenia gravis). At other times the autoantibodies are not pathogenic but can still be a useful diagnostic marker of disease, for example, liver autoantibodies.

### **Antinuclear Antibody (ANA) Testing: When and Why?**

ANA testing is sensitive (~99%) but not specific for systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and is useful for the diagnosis of a number of other systemic autoimmune conditions (Sjogren's Syndrome, Systemic Sclerosis, Mixed Connective Tissue Disease, Inflammatory myopathies, Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis, and Autoimmune Liver Disease).

**An ANA should **ONLY** be ordered when there are clear and objective clinical features suggesting that one of the above systemic autoimmune diseases are present:**

- Unexplained systemic inflammation (infection and malignancy ruled out)
- Mouth ulcers, hair loss, characteristic rashes of SLE/dermatomyositis (e.g. photosensitive, malar, SCLE, Gottron's papules)
- Inflammatory arthritis (confirmed objectively)
- Sicca symptoms (dry eyes/mouth confirmed objectively)
- Serositis (pleuritis, pericarditis)
- Glomerular kidney disease (confirmed haematuria/proteinuria)
- Myositis (raised CK)
- Interstitial lung disease (documented on radiology)
- Skin thickening (documented on clinical examination)
- Raynaud's phenomenon especially with nailfold capillary loop changes
- Leukopenia, lymphopenia, or haemolytic anaemia not otherwise explained

**Do NOT test for ANA in patients with:**

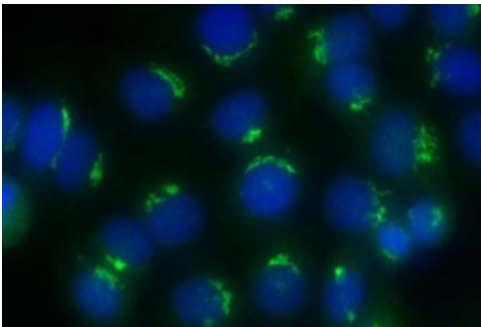
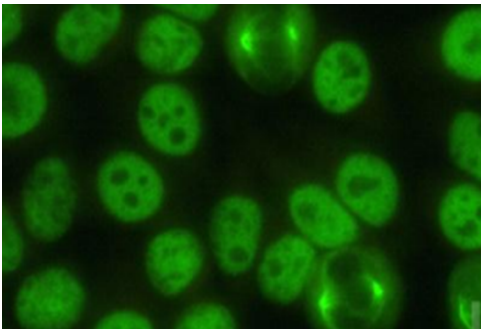
Fatigue, osteoarthritis, gout, low back pain, non-specific rashes or in patients with established systemic autoimmune diseases to monitor disease activity.

ANA and ENA testing only needs to be done once in any patient and should not be repeated unless there are new clinical features as listed above to suggest a systemic autoimmune condition.

**ANA Interpretation**

An ANA test result will state whether an ANA is detected, the pattern, and the titre. Higher titres are more likely to be clinically significant. ANA patterns associated with a consistent common antigen are more likely to be seen in autoimmune disease (e.g. a homogeneous ANA with a positive dsDNA autoantibody). The four common ANA patterns reported, and their clinical associations are listed below:

For more detailed ANA pattern interpretation, visit [www.anapatterns.org](http://www.anapatterns.org).



ANA pattern	Common Antigens	Clinical Associations
Homogeneous	dsDNA, Histones, Nucleosomes	SLE, Drug-induced lupus, Autoimmune hepatitis
Speckled	SSA/Ro, SSB/La, Sm, RNP, Scl-70	Sjogren's Syndrome, SLE, Mixed Connective Tissue Disease, Systemic sclerosis
Nucleolar	Various nucleolar antigens	Systemic sclerosis, especially diffuse cutaneous
Centromere	CENP-B	Limited systemic sclerosis (CREST syndrome)

### Insights into testing the right person and testing equity

Local Testing Insights and Equity data generated through both Awanui Labs and Pathlab has revealed the following:

1. **We need to test more women:** Although ANA testing is performed mostly in women (Female: Male ratio 2:1), it is still not high enough when the female: male ratio for SLE is much higher at 9-12:1

2. **We need to test in younger patients:** We are testing too many older people; 40% of the testing occurs in those over 60 who account for less than 15% of the cases of SLE.

3. **We need to test more Māori and Pasifika:** Māori and Pacific peoples have approximately half the ANA screening rates compared to NZ Europeans despite a higher incidence of SLE.

This underscores opportunities to optimize test requesting to improve equity and target higher-risk groups better.

### Summary and Recommendations

- ANA and autoimmune serology should be requested based on genuine clinical suspicion, not when there are nonspecific symptoms or as general screening.
- Order and interpret autoantibody results carefully in the clinical context to avoid false positives/negatives.
- Recognize ethnic and demographic factors in disease risk and test utilization.
- Consult specialists for complex cases or unclear results.

For questions about testing or interpretation, please contact the immunology laboratory. We are here to support you in delivering accurate and clinically useful diagnostic information for your patients.

Thank you for your commitment to high-quality patient care.



Dr Richard Steele  
Immunopathology and Chief  
Medical Officer  
Awanui Laboratory

## Home Visit Service Update - Same Day Requests

Awanui Labs Auckland is implementing a new policy regarding urgent same-day home visit requests.

Recent reviews of home visit activity have highlighted a pattern of late-day urgent requests, particularly from rest homes, that do not meet the clinical intent of urgent community pathology. These requests often arrive after our phlebotomists have already attended a facility, disrupt planned routes, and result in specimens reaching the laboratory outside optimal processing times. In many cases, results are not reviewed until the following day, negating the urgency.

To improve service efficiency and ensure resources remain available for patients with genuine clinical need, a 12:00 PM cut-off time is now in place for urgent same-day home visit bookings.

Requests received after this time will be scheduled for the following day, unless a pathologist has approved an exception for a true clinical emergency.

This adjustment supports the role of community pathology as a non-acute service. Where patients require urgent or hospital-level assessment, these are most appropriately managed through hospital pathways.

Facilities are also reminded that use of terminology such as “delirium screen” or “housebound” does not automatically meet urgency criteria.

By introducing this policy, we aim to:

- Support timely processing of specimens during optimal laboratory hours
- Improve allocation of resources to fasting and routine morning collections
- Reduce inefficiencies caused by late-day call-backs
- Ensure urgent home visits are reserved for patients whose results will immediately influence care decisions

For further details, please see our updated Home Visit Guidelines, FAQ for Referrers, or contact our Home Visit Administration Team at;

[auk.home.visits@awanuilabs.co.nz](mailto:auk.home.visits@awanuilabs.co.nz).

## Online Booking System Expands Across Auckland

Awanui Labs is pleased to announce that our online booking system is now available at all Auckland collection centres, with appointments offered on selected days of the week. This step follows the successful roll-out earlier this year at Glenfield, Glen Innes, Glendene, and Manurewa, where feedback from patients and referrers has been very positive.

The booking system provides patients with the option of choosing a set time for their blood test, helping to reduce waiting and make visits more predictable. Walk-ins remain welcome at every centre, ensuring flexibility for those who prefer or require same-day testing.

Appointments are currently offered during times when demand is generally lower. This helps create a smoother flow for patients while protecting access for urgent and walk-in testing on busier days. Bookings are also carefully managed at smaller sites, where limiting appointments allows staff to remain available for all patients.

Patients have told us they value the ability to plan ahead, especially those balancing work, school, or caring responsibilities. For others, such as patients with disabilities, autism, or social anxiety, a confirmed appointment reduces waiting time which provides reassurance and helps make the experience of having a blood test less stressful.

Booking online is quick and simple. Patients receive a confirmation email with a QR code that can be scanned on arrival for faster check-in. Specialised tests such as glucose tolerance tests, Mantoux, and DNA testing can also be booked online.

Patients can book their tests at:

[booking.labapps.nz](https://booking.labapps.nz)

We are excited to deliver this initiative for our patients, making their visits easier and more convenient while maintaining an accessible service for all.



Northland Key Contacts			(09) 438 4243
Results		Press '1'	24 hours/7 days per week
Test Bookings	Book online through <a href="http://www.awanuilabs.co.nz">www.awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Press '2'	
Home Visits	Email <a href="mailto:nth.homevisits@awanuilabs.co.nz">nth.homevisits@awanuilabs.co.nz</a> If the home visit cannot be booked for the date requested Home Visits staff will contact the referrer to arrange an alternative date. Phone enquiries to (09)438 4243	Press '3'	Mon-Fri: 8:00am to 3:00pm
Stores	<a href="mailto:nth.stores@awanuilabs.co.nz">nth.stores@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Press '4'	Mon-Fri 8:00am to 5:00pm
Other Enquiries	<a href="mailto:nth.admin@awanuilabs.co.nz">nth.admin@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Press '5' or Hold the line	Mon-Fri 8:00am to 6:00pm
E-orders Helpline	Email: <a href="mailto:helpdesk@eorder.co.nz">helpdesk@eorder.co.nz</a>	0508 37 37 83	

Auckland Key Contacts			(09) 574 7399
Results		Press '1'	24 hours/7 days per week
Courier		Press '2'	24 hours/7 days per week
Home Visits	Email to <a href="mailto:auk.home.visits@awanuilabs.co.nz">auk.home.visits@awanuilabs.co.nz</a> (preferred) If the home visit cannot be booked for the date requested Home Visits staff will contact the referrer to arrange an alternative date.	Press '3'	Mon-Fri: 8:00am to 6:00pm Sat: 8:00am to 12:00pm
Special test bookings		Press '4'	Mon-Fri 8:00am to 6:00pm
Other Enquiries		Hold the line	Mon-Fri 7:00am to 11pm Sat-Sun 8:00am to 7:00pm
Add on tests	Requests for add on tests can be emailed to: <a href="mailto:call.centre@awanuilabs.co.nz">call.centre@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>		Note: some add on tests may require pathologists' approval.
Consumables orders	To enquire about consumables orders	Press '2'	Mon-Fri 07:00am to 3:30pm
Dedicated line for practitioners to access all results (24/7)		(09) 574 7398	

## Pathologists:

ph (09) 574 7398

## Medical Director: Dr Lesley Overend

[Lesley.Overend@awanuilabs.co.nz](mailto:Lesley.Overend@awanuilabs.co.nz)

Chemical Pathologists	Haematologists	Microbiologists
Dr Charles Ng <a href="mailto:Charles.Ng@awanuilabs.co.nz">Charles.Ng@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Dr Lesley Overend <a href="mailto:Lesley.Overend@awanuilabs.co.nz">Lesley.Overend@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Dr Ranmini Kularatne <a href="mailto:Ranmini.Kularatne@awanuilabs.co.nz">Ranmini.Kularatne@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>
Dr Melissa Yssel <a href="mailto:Melissa.Yssel@awanuilabs.co.nz">Melissa.Yssel@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Dr Francisca De Silva <a href="mailto:Francisca.Desilva@awanuilabs.co.nz">Francisca.Desilva@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Dr Matt Blakiston <a href="mailto:Matthew.Blakiston@awanuilabs.co.nz">Matthew.Blakiston@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>
Dr Cam Kyle <a href="mailto:Cam.Kyle@awanuilabs.co.nz">Cam.Kyle@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Dr Kim Nash <a href="mailto:Kim.Nash@awanuilabs.co.nz">Kim.Nash@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>	Dr Aakash Chhibber <a href="mailto:Aakash.Chhibber@awanuilabs.co.nz">Aakash.Chhibber@awanuilabs.co.nz</a>



The contact number for Anatomic Pathology Mt Wellington is:  
Phone (09) 302 0516