

## GERMS-SA Audits: From data quality management to laboratory evaluation

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According to *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, the universally accepted definition of an audit is an evaluation of a person, organisation, system, process, enterprise, project or product. The term most commonly refers to audits in accounting, internal auditing and government auditing. However, similar concepts also exist in project management, quality management, water management and energy conservation. At GERMS-SA we have been conducting audits on a formal basis since 2007 with the primary objective of an audit being to assess the quality of the data sample and not the individual laboratory's systems or performance. Other objectives of GERMS-SA audits are:

- To ensure that all isolates for GERMS-SA surveillance are being reported to the respective reference laboratories
- To ascertain the percentage of missed isolates to monitor representativeness and efficacy of national surveillance
- To use the percentage of those missing to ascertain a 'correction factor', to be used in data dissemination and publications
- To aid laboratories which may have difficulties in any of the steps of collection of data

Surveillance audits are essential quality control measures to ensure that data collected via the GERMS-SA programme for the respective reference laboratories are representative. Audits are conducted on a quarterly basis in a cumulative manner (four times in a year). The GERMS-SA coordinators have access to the Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) where all DISA Lab and TrakCare Lab entries are captured onto a central repository. Using the CDW we are able to search for all organisms isolated at each NHLS lab and compare those to the records we have. We are then able to determine which isolates were not submitted to the reference laboratories and we call these "audits". We then use the audit data to supplement what we have and to subsequently generate our quarterly reports, i.e. Quarterly Statistics and Enhanced Surveillance Site Operational Report. However, it is more useful to have the isolate for further characterisation therefore **we encourage all NHLS labs to remember to submit all GERMS-SA isolates (pg 14)**. The higher the percentage of audits identified for any NHLS laboratory the poorer the image of that particular laboratory. Although the primary objective of an audit is not to assess the individual laboratory's systems or performance, it is one of the objectives. We are sure nobody wants to have consistently high audit numbers, have poor quarterly statistics and be considered a poorly performing lab in terms of surveillance...or do they? Either way we're watching you!