

## From the ECRI Institute PSO Deep Dive: An Examination of “Lab” Errors

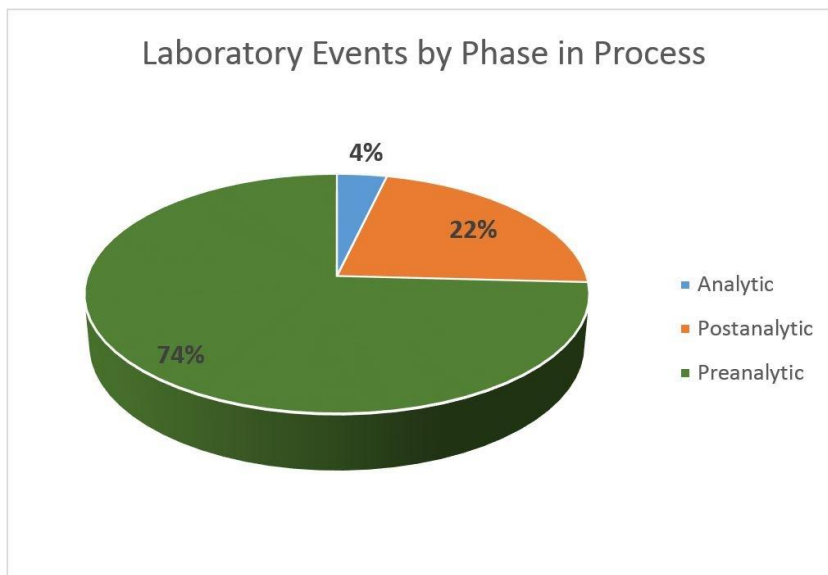
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ECRI Institute PSO’s [third Deep Dive focused on laboratory events](#)—specifically, the impact of errors in the laboratory testing process on clinical decision making. Many of the adverse events and near misses reported to ECRI Institute PSO and examined in the Deep Dive reflect the systems issues involved in diagnostic errors.

ECRI Institute PSO analyzed nearly 2,500 laboratory events; however, only 4% of these events actually occurred inside the physical boundaries of the laboratory. While startling, this finding isn’t exactly a surprise; ECRI Institute PSO tackled this topic in its [June 2012 Monthly Brief](#) and PSO member publications. The Deep Dive also contains a tool to help organizations monitor the issue.

In fact, the top three laboratory error categories\* identified are mislabeled specimens, specimens with no label or an incomplete label, and test results that were delayed or missing. All three of these “lab event” types occur *outside* the lab.

Further, most lab events seen by ECRI Institute PSO occur during the preanalytic phase—typically, patient identification or specimen labeling mistakes—and postanalytic phase, such as when there is a delay in communication of results.



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Whether you have questions about the final rule or want to learn more about ECRI Institute PSO and/or support for other PSOs, we would be happy to hear from you. Please contact ECRI Institute at [psa@ecri.org](mailto:psa@ecri.org) or call (610) 825-6000, ext. 5558.

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The literature suggests that events in the postanalytic phase may be more likely to harm the patient—especially if the reporting of a test result is delayed or not performed. Likewise, many postanalytic-phase event reports submitted to ECRI Institute PSO suggest concern regarding potential harm to the patient as a result of the delay.

The first step in strengthening lab improvement initiatives is to gain the support of leadership for them. The next step is to engage all the stakeholders—not just lab staff—in the testing process. Yes, some lab errors actually occur in the lab. However, remember: The vast majority of lab errors happen outside the lab.

[Contact us](#), and let us demonstrate how we can help you.

*\* ECRI Institute PSO's taxonomy includes 14 laboratory event types; the top three categories are drawn from this pool of 14.*

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