



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

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Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D. Secretary

Laboratories Administration  
Robert A. Myers, Ph.D., Director

**Date:** December 9, 2014

**To:** Medical Laboratory Directors, Local Health Officers and  
Healthcare Providers

**From:** Robert A. Myers, Ph.D.   
Director, Laboratories Administration

**Re: Discontinuing Enhanced Influenza A Virus Surveillance Effective December 9, 2014**

Effective today, December 9, 2014, enhanced viral surveillance will be refocused and it will no longer be necessary to submit all positive influenza A clinical specimens to the DHMH Laboratory for typing and further characterization. We are now requesting that only a subset of specimens, as detailed below, be submitted to DHMH for testing.

Influenza activity in Maryland is now increasing substantially, with a predominance of influenza A H3N2 infections. Enhanced viral surveillance was implemented early in the influenza season to quickly identify and further characterize the influenza viruses circulating in the State. Now that prevalence of influenza has increased, there is high correlation between the results of commercially-available rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs) and the CDC Influenza rRT-PCR diagnostic panel that the DHMH Laboratory performs.

Therefore, effective today, submission of specimens for influenza testing for routine surveillance purposes are now limited to the following conditions:

1.) FOR ALL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS:

Upper and/or lower respiratory tract specimens from hospitalized (admitted for observation or as an inpatient) with influenza-like illness (ILI), where ILI is defined as fever ( $>37.8\text{ C}^{\circ}$  or  $>100\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$  AND cough or sore throat) or patients with severe respiratory illness of an unknown etiology regardless of the results of initial influenza testing.

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### **2.) FOR PARTICIPANTS IN DHMH INFLUENZA SENTINEL LABORATORY AND SENTINEL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS:**

Sentinel laboratories or health care providers who have enrolled in the DHMH influenza surveillance network should continue to submit routine surveillance specimens to the DHMH Public Health Laboratory, limiting these submissions to no more than 10 influenza A specimens per week.

As always, we request submission of specimens for any potential novel influenza A virus infections. Submission of specimens from patients with recent swine exposures will be accepted for timely influenza A H3N2v diagnostic testing. Also, arrangements for priority testing to possibly detect avian influenza viruses, such as influenza A H7N9 and H5N1, can still be made if patients meet recommended clinical and epidemiological criteria (contact your local health department to confirm criteria are met and to coordinate the submission of these specimens to the State).

Please visit our web site (<http://dhmh.maryland.gov/laboratories/SitePages/Influenza.aspx>) and select the PDF at the top of the page (“Specimen Submission Guidelines (August 16, 2012)”) for the logistical details of submitting influenza specimens to the DHMH Laboratory. You can also contact us at (410) 767-5819 for questions regarding changes to surveillance testing program.

Your participation in the enhanced influenza surveillance program was greatly appreciated. The specimens that were submitted to the DHMH Laboratory for testing provided valuable insights into the nature and progression of the 2013-14 influenza transmission season.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding in this matter.

cc: Dr. Laura Herrera  
Dr. David Blythe  
Dr. Lucy Wilson  
Dr. Katherine Feldman  
Brian Bachaus