



STATE OF MARYLAND
DHMH

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

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – John M. Colmers, Secretary

Laboratories Administration
John M. DeBoy, Dr.P.H., Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 6, 2009 **Lab Update Guidance # 3.0**

TO: Medical Laboratory Directors
Health Officers
Communicable Disease Directors
Communicable Disease Staff
Nursing Directors

FROM: John M. DeBoy, DrPH
Director, Laboratories Administration

RE: **Revised Laboratory-Based Influenza Testing**

Effective today, in response to the latest CDC guidance on school closures related to illnesses associated with the Influenza A/H1N1 (swine-like) virus, the DHMH Laboratories Administration (DHMH Lab) will operate under a revised laboratory-based influenza testing program.

The major change to the previous testing algorithm for non-sentinel providers is the elimination of the recommendation to test non-hospitalized daycare/school age children, and teachers presenting with influenza like illness (ILI).

This revised patient and surveillance testing is based on two revised DHMH “Interim Guidance for Specimen Collection for Possible Swine Flu Cases for Sentinel Providers and Local Health Departments” and “Interim Guidance for Specimen Collection for Possible Swine Flu Cases for Providers” updated on 5/5/09 7:48PM . Submission of specimens must be vetted by public health before they can be sent to DHMH Laboratories for testing. Contact your local Health Department immediately prior to any specimen submissions. Under this new guidance (and algorithm: <http://dhmh.state.md.us/labs>), the DHMH Lab will now test specimens **limited to** those from:

1. A patient with a fever $>37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ (100°F) and respiratory symptoms (cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea) or sepsis-like syndrome **AND** who is:
 - a. Hospitalized;
 - b. A healthcare worker (including EMS);
 - c. part of an outbreak under investigation by the local health department; or
2. A DHMH-registered sentinel influenza provider [Maryland Outpatient influenza surveillance network (ILINET)] or laboratories participating in the DHMH influenza surveillance program.

Laboratory questions concerning the submission of specimens that meet these criteria may be directed to the DHMH Lab by telephoning 410-767-6152, 8:00-4:30 M-F, and 410-925-3121 after normal working hours.

Revised Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Testing Cont. (Page 2 of 2, 5/6/09)

Specimen Submission and Transport. Collect and send ≥ 1.0 ml respiratory specimens (nasopharyngeal swabs, nasal aspirate; nasal swab plus throat swabs; and lower respiratory aspirates/washes/sputum if appropriate) in viral transport media only, and package it for refrigerated transport (cold packs) to the DHMH Laboratories. Submitters should follow the specimen submission and transport guidelines used for seasonal influenza specimens.

In true emergency circumstances where a local health-care employee is not available to serve as courier, an emergency courier pick-up can be coordinated and approved by the DHMH Lab, after consultation with the DHMH physician-on-call or epidemiologist on-call.

Testing and Reporting Turn-Around-Time (TAT). Effective today and until further notice, the DHMH Lab is implementing a 1-2 working days TAT for influenza screening (non-emergency specimens). Specimens needing confirmatory testing will require another working day.

H1N1 Influenza Virus Biosafety Guidelines for Laboratory Workers. The CDC biosafety guidelines for laboratory workers processing or performing diagnostic testing on clinical specimens from patients with possible H1N1 (swine) influenza virus infection or performing viral isolation can be found at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines_labworkers.htm.

Rapid Influenza Tests. For information on rapid influenza testing refer to http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/rapid_testing.htm.

Flu Specimen Collection Kits for Possible Swine Flu Cases. The Laboratories Administration shipped collection kits twice to the local health departments in the last week for use Influenza A/H1N1 (swine-like) virus infections, and will continue to provide kits to local health departments as supplies allow. Clinicians and health care providers lacking specimen collection materials and who need to collect specimens from possible cases meeting the surveillance criteria stated above can obtain flu collection kits from their local health department. Unfortunately the limited supply of viral transport medium (VTM) precludes the repositioning of collection kits with other health care providers.

Weekend Service (May 9 and 10, 2009). The laboratory loading dock will be open Saturday and Sunday from 8:00AM-4:30 PM to accept specimens. All specimens for influenza testing received by noon on Saturday, May 9 will be tested on the same day. Non-emergency specimens received after noon on Saturday and on Sunday will be tested on Monday. Laboratory staff will be on call on Saturday night thru Sunday to test emergency specimens if required.

For additional questions or concerns regarding novel H1N1 influenza A testing at the DHMH Laboratories, please contact Dr. Robert Myers or Dr. Maria Paz Carlos at 410-767-6152 during normal business hour or the DHMH Laboratory's emergency communication number 410-925-3121 after business hours. **This public health situation continues to evolve and we will provide additional information as it becomes available.**

As always, we appreciate your continued vigilance and cooperation.

cc: J. Colmers S. Adams D. Paulson R. Stringer
R. Myers M. Carlos T. Elkin J. Krick
A. Romanosky F. Phillips P. Sybinsky
K. Black D. Blythe