Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

Surveillance Testing for Influenza, 2023-24 Season Laboratory Guidance

The following guidelines have been developed to allow for geographic monitoring of the circulating strains of influenza and anti-viral resistance trends in our state using a combination of clinical laboratory and Montana Public Health Laboratory testing data. Your participation is very important to our surveillance program, and we very much appreciate your help!

Fee-Waived Testing

Select Hospital Laboratories	For the week ending October 7, 2023, fourteen (14) designated hospital laboratories will begin submitting two (2) fee-waived specimens each week.
Other Clinical Laboratories	Thirty-three (33) additional clinical laboratories from around the state have been designated to provide specimens for confirmation of rapid tests or ILI. Five (5) fee-waived tests throughout the season will be provided to each lab.
Sentinel Providers	Sentinel providers, designated by DPHHS CDEpi, will submit up to five (5) fee-waived sentinel specimens throughout the season.
Clusters/Outbreaks	Consultation with MT DPHHS-CDEpi (406-444-0273) is **required prior** to specimen submission. Up to three (3) fee-waived specimens may be tested to determine the cluster type and subtype. **Note:** A cluster of influenza is defined as 2-3 cases who have onset of influenza-like illness (ILI) within 72 hours of each other **AND** are associated with the same institution, activity, or event (i.e., school, travel, or work)
Special/Unique Circumstances	Consultation with MT DPHHS-CDEpi (406-444-0273) is **required prior** to specimen submission. Approval is on a case-by-case basis

Laboratory Surveillance specimens will be rescreened for both Influenza A and Influenza B by PCR. All Influenza A positive specimens will be subtyped and all influenza B specimens will be genotyped to identify the lineage. A representative number of these specimens will be referred to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for further characterization and anti-viral resistance testing. All influenza surveillance testing is fee-waived.

***If possible, **please test your specimens for COVID prior to submission**. A pop-up question on the online portal will ask for results.

Specimen Collection

- Specimens should be collected within 3 days of onset of symptoms. After 3 days, the viral shedding is reduced, and may be harder to detect.
- Respiratory specimens (nasopharyngeal swab, throat swab, nasal swab, or combination NP/Throat swab) must be submitted in Universal Transport Media (UTM) or Viral Transport Media (VTM) in cold condition. Flocked nasopharyngeal and regular swabs are provided in the UTM/VTM kits.
- **Do not** submit a swab or residual fluid that has been used for Rapid testing; these will be rejected as an unsatisfactory specimen. A second swab must be collected and submitted in UTM.
- Make sure that the transport media is being stored properly. Some can be stored at room temperature, and others must be stored refrigerated.
- After the specimen has been introduced to the transport media, the specimen should be stored cold and transported to the MTPHL in a cold condition. Please freeze if there is going to be a delay in transport >3 days.
- Specimens can be transported via courier or mail as a Biologic Substance, Category B, and should be received within 48 hours of collection.

Online Ordering

- For designated surveillance sites and pre-approved sites, please select ***"Inf PCR Surv"*** on the online portal.
- Please complete all requested information, including the clinical information questions that pop-up on the screen, as appropriate. Questions include results of Rapid or PCR Testing and COVID testing (if performed), whether the patient is hospitalized, vaccination status, and other pertinent information.

Turn Around Time

- Turnaround time is expected to be less than 72 hours from specimen receipt, although this time may vary.

If you have any questions, call the Montana Public Health Laboratory at 1-800-821-7284.