

## Respiratory Season is Just Around the Corner

Surveillance for the 2024-2025 influenza season officially begins on Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Receiving positive influenza specimens to Montana Public Health Lab (MTPHL) for surveillance testing is important in determining the circulating strains and prevalence. MTPHL also shares these specimens with the Centers for Disease Control for further characterization and testing for antiviral resistance.

This season we will be conducting influenza surveillance like last year. We are asking clinical laboratory partners that perform molecular testing for influenza to report their total test numbers, and the number of positives, on a weekly basis here: <https://form.jotform.com/242525065218049>. These data will be aggregated and reported on the influenza dashboard on a weekly basis. These molecular laboratories should have received information about this reporting. If you did not receive information on reporting or if you have questions, please contact the Viral Respiratory Epidemiologist, Sam Saycich at [Samantha.saycich@mt.gov](mailto:Samantha.saycich@mt.gov)

In addition to the molecular data collected from sentinel sites, fourteen (14) hospital laboratories have been geographically selected to submit two (2) specimens per week for fee-waived surveillance testing, even if they have been confirmed by molecular methods in-house. This surveillance allows for geographic monitoring of the circulating strains of influenza, as well as further characterization and anti-viral resistance trends in our state.

Five (5) fee-waived tests are also being offered to thirty- three (33) additional clinical laboratories from various geographic locations to be used at their discretion. These fee-waived tests should be used to confirm the presence of circulating influenza virus in their patient population (e.g., confirmation of rapid test positive specimens and testing for individuals displaying influenza-like illness (ILI)).

Suspected clusters/outbreaks or special circumstances surrounding ILI should be reported to your [local or tribal health department](#) and special arrangements may be made for testing at MTPHL.

**NEW: Confirmatory testing for early-season positive rapid antigens is no longer required.** We still encourage facilities to submit specimens for surveillance testing, especially during outbreak response. Surveillance testing allows us to monitor what types of flu are circulating (e.g., Flu A H3N2, Flu A H1N1, Flu B Victoria Lineage). In addition to our designated surveillance sites, we have a limited amount of funding to support this testing for our non-designated clinical laboratory sites. Once funding is depleted, we will only be able to accept specimens for surveillance on a case-by-case basis. MTPHL also has a respiratory panel (Inf A, Inf B, COVID, RSV) available for testing for multiple conditions at once. For more information on the respiratory panel and other testing available at MTPHL, please visit [Montana Public Health Laboratory Services Manual \(mt.gov\)](#)

When submitting specimens for testing to the MTPHL, please do not submit specimens that are the residual from rapid tests. Specimens must be collected into universal or viral transport media and shipped in a cold condition. Please use the online portal for ordering your surveillance test request. The designated surveillance laboratories should have already received information on submission process. If you have any questions, please contact MTPHL at 1-800-821-7284.

For more information surrounding designated surveillance sites, specimen collection, diagnostic testing, and surveillance testing, please visit the [MTPHL website](#).

For more information about influenza activity in the United States during the influenza season, visit the [Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report \(FluView\)](#).

For more information about respiratory surveillance in Montana, visit the DPHHS [CDEpi COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV Website](#). Two dashboards displaying current activity for COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV can be found there.

Thank you for helping make a successful Influenza Surveillance Program for Montana!!!