Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services
Diagnostic Testing for Suspect Influenza, 2026-27 Season
Laboratory Guidance

The Montana Public Health Laboratory (MTPHL) offers accurate and timely molecular (RT-PCR) testing for Influenza A & B, including subtyping for Influenza A-positive specimens. Early influenza diagnosis can reduce inappropriate antibiotic use and enable antiviral therapy. Subtyping provides additional data on the strains circulating in your jurisdiction, including novel strains.

Specimen Collection

- Collect specimens within 24-72 hours of symptom onset. After 3 days, viral shedding is reduced and may no longer be detectable, depending on the assay.

- Respiratory Specimens (nasopharyngeal swabs, throat swabs, nasal swabs, combination NP/Throat swabs) must be submitted in Universal Transport Media (UTM) or Viral Transport Media (VTM) in cold condition. Failure to submit in UTM or VTM will cause the specimen to be rejected as an "Unsatisfactory Specimen".

- **Do not** submit a swab or residual fluid that has been used for Rapid Influenza Diagnostic Tests (RIDTs); these will be rejected as an unsatisfactory specimen. Collect and submit a second swab in UTM.
  NOTE: Store the transport media appropriately. Some transport media can be stored at room temperature, and others must be stored refrigerated. After introducing the specimen to the transport media, store it cold and transport it to the MTPHL under cold condition. Please freeze if transport will be delayed by more than 3 days.

- Specimens can be transported by courier or as a Category B biologic substance and should be received within 48 hours of collection.

Rapid Influenza Diagnostic Tests (RIDTs)

- MTPHL can confirm positive RIDT results by RT-PCR. If the specimen is positive for Influenza A, MTPHL will perform subtyping.

- Specimens that are rapid-test negative for Influenza from patients exhibiting symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI) should be confirmed by a more sensitive test (RT-PCR) if determined by the clinician to be highly suspect of Influenza.

Respiratory Panel (Influenza A, Influenza B, SARS-CoV-2, and RSV)

- MTPHL also offers a respiratory panel for patients exhibiting symptoms of ILI.
- To order, select "**SARS-CoV-2 Flu AB RSV Panel**" on the online portal
- Submit an NP swab in viral transport medium (VTM) or Universal Transport Media (UTM)

Fees

Diagnostic influenza testing is still being offered at a reduced rate for the 2026-2027 season. The fee for an Influenza A and B PCR screen is $60 (CPT code 87502). All Influenza A-positive specimens will be reflexed to subtyping for $35 (CPT code 87503), and the viral Respiratory Panel is $65 (CPT code 87631).

Online Requisition Form

- On the online order screen, select "**Inf A-B PCR"**, *not "Inf PCR Surv" (this is for surveillance only)*.
- Please complete all requested information, including the clinical information questions that pop-up on the screen, as appropriate.

Turn Around Time

- Turnaround time is expected to be less than 48 hours from specimen receipt, although this time may vary.

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