

NJ Public Health and Environmental Laboratories Recommendations

NJ Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL) is forwarding this notification to all clinical and commercial laboratories in response to the recent CDC Health Alert Network (HAN) message on 1/16/25 regarding the recommendation to expedite subtyping of influenza A specimens for hospitalized individuals.

Currently circulating seasonal influenza A subtypes include (A)H1N1 and (A)H3N2. Since April 2024, the CDC has been monitoring an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus related to infected dairy cattle as well as ongoing circulation of these viruses in wild and domestic birds. CDC maintains that the current risk these viruses pose to the public remains low. For more information, refer to the full text of the HAN available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/han/2025/han00520.html>

If you have any questions regarding clinical testing for HPAI A(H5N1) viruses at PHEL, please contact phel.influenza@doh.nj.gov

NJ PHEL is recommending the following for clinical laboratories:

- 1) Hospital laboratories should:
 - a. Perform an influenza subtyping test that identifies seasonal influenza A subtypes (H1N1 and H3N2) on hospitalized patients with confirmed influenza A infection
 - b. Decrease turnaround time for subtyping tests. Ideally, subtyping results should be available within 24 hours.
- 2) If a laboratory is unable to perform in-house subtyping on hospitalized influenza A patients:
 - a. Utilize testing available through commercial laboratories when possible
 - b. Prioritize subtyping severe cases, especially all individuals in an intensive care unit (ICU)
 - c. Prioritize subtyping of influenza specimens for any cases with epidemiological risk factors, such as exposure to poultry, dairy cattle, consumption of raw milk- see HAN for full criteria
- 3) If subtyping is **unavailable** through any of the mechanisms above, PHEL is able to test a subset of respiratory samples. You can submit to PHEL:
 - a. All ICU patients for whom subtyping is not able to be performed
 - b. Up to 5 inpatient samples a week
 - c. Any unsubtypeable influenza specimens
 - d. Email phel.influenza@doh.nj.gov to notify us that your facility will be utilizing testing at PHEL in advance of your first shipment.

Specimens Shipping Guidance

- 1) Store residual specimens refrigerated (2-8°C) for **no longer than 72 hours** from time of collection. If specimens are not delivered to PHEL within 72 hours, freeze at -70°C or below.
 - a. Maintaining frozen temperatures is **critical** to maintaining specimen integrity.

- b. Laboratories may also consider sending an aliquot (at least 0.5mL) in a secondary tube labeled with 2 patient identifiers (name and DOB) that is kept frozen.
- 2) **Maintain temperature during specimen transport** (via courier or overnight shipping).
 - a. If not able to maintain frozen temperature during entire transport (i.e. on dry ice), shipping on frozen ice packs is acceptable, but the ice packs should be cold enough to remain frozen.

Full specimen submission guidance is available on PHEL's web page [Respiratory Virus Testing at NJ PHEL | NJ DOH](#)

Links to Additional Information

[NJ LINCS Message: Accelerated Subtyping of Influenza A in Hospitalized Patients | NJ DOH](#)

[New Jersey H5N1 Resources | NJ DOH](#)

[Bird Flu Information | CDC](#)