

Testing for Seasonal Influenza at PHEL

Guidelines for Clinical and Commercial Laboratories

Table of Contents

Influenza Testing Criteria	1
Specimens that should be submitted to PHEL:	2
Specimen Collection and Storage	2
Specimen Collection.....	2
Specimen Storage	3
Test Ordering and Specimen Submission:	3
Specimen Labeling	3
How to order a Test Request: Influenza Diagnostic Testing	3
Specimen Shipping to PHEL.....	4

Influenza Testing Criteria

Testing for influenza is performed to support the statewide influenza surveillance system. This information is used to:

- Find out when and where influenza activity is occurring
- Determine what influenza viruses are circulating
- Detect changes in influenza viruses
- Detect novel influenza virus infections
- Measure the impact influenza is having on illness, hospitalizations, and deaths
- Current surveillance reports of circulating seasonal flu can be found [here](#).

A novel influenza virus is an influenza A virus with a subtype that is different from the flu viruses that usually spread in people (currently Influenza A/H3N2 and A/H1N1). Human infections with novel or variant flu viruses may occur because of the close contact between humans and animals or because of mutations in the influenza virus.

Specimens that should be submitted to PHEL

- **Unsubtypeable influenza A specimens** should be submitted for subtyping **as soon as possible**.
 - Unsubtypeable is defined as a specimen which tests positive for Influenza A, but does not give a positive subtype (e.g., H3, H1N1pdm2009, etc.) on the testing platform being used.
 - This may be indicative of a novel influenza strain.
 - Do **NOT** include specimens which were **not tested** for influenza subtype.
 - If you have an Unsubtypeable influenza specimen or further questions, please contact the Virology Laboratory by email: phel.influenza@doh.nj.gov.
- Confirmed or suspected influenza A and/or B specimens may also be submitted for routine influenza surveillance testing. To enroll as a surveillance provider, please contact phel.influenza@doh.nj.gov
- Specimens from individuals suspected to have infection with a novel influenza strain.
 - If you suspect novel influenza or to determine whether an individual meets these criteria, contact the communicable disease service at 609-826-5964.
 - More information is available here: [Department of Health | Communicable Disease Service | Novel Influenza \(nj.gov\)](#)

Specimen Collection and Storage

Specimen Collection

- Collect specimens aseptically as soon as possible after symptom onset or at autopsy.
- Refer to the CDC guidelines available [here](#) for current specimen collection recommendations.
- For detailed instructions on how to collect respiratory specimens see: [Respiratory Specimen Collection](#)
- Proper [infection control practices](#) should be followed during specimen collection.
- Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts.
- **Preferred specimen type:**
 - **Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab**, placed in a transport tube containing 1-3 mL viral transport media (VTM). Nasopharyngeal specimens may have higher yield than nasal or OP swab.
- **Other Accepted Specimens:**
 - Nasal mid turbinate swabs and anterior nasal swabs in VTM
 - Oropharyngeal (OP) swab- CDC recommends collecting only the NP specimen, although an OP specimen is an acceptable specimen type. If both NP and OP specimens are collected, combine them in a single tube of VTM.
 - Nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal wash/aspirate
 - Bronchoalveolar lavage, tracheal aspirate, pleural fluid

Note: Saliva and sputum are **not acceptable** specimens for testing at PHEL and **will be rejected**.

Specimen Storage

- Diagnostic specimens can be stored at 2-8°C for up to 72 hours after collection. Refrigerated specimens not received within the 72-hour window will be rejected.
- If testing is expected to occur after 72 hours of collection, store specimens frozen at -70°C or below and ship on dry ice.
 - Specimens frozen at -20°C or below will be accepted, but this could result in sample degradation and specimen may not be acceptable quality for testing.
- **Maintaining specimen temperature during transport is critical to maintain specimen quality.**

Test Ordering and Specimen Submission

Specimen Labeling

- Label each specimen with a minimum of two patient identifiers (e.g. the patient's name and date of birth). Ensure the patient's name and DOB matches the specimen label **exactly**.
- When possible, test requests should be submitted electronically through our Online Ordering and Reporting portal. For a quick reference guide to using the portal, [see How To Order Respiratory Testing Online](#)
 - To gain access to this portal, please see instructions located [here](#).
- If you are unable to order test requests electronically, please fill out our current paper requisition form (SRD-1) [here](#).

How to Order a Test Request

- To request influenza testing, please request "Respiratory Viral Surveillance (Influenza + SARS-CoV-2) (90850)"

Select	Abbreviation	Name	Alternate ID1	Collection Information	Host Codes
<input type="checkbox"/>	90850	Respiratory Viral Surveillance (Influenza + SARS-CoV-2)	90850	Other in Not Specified	IO-90850

- NOTE: Some providers may also see a test called "Influenza subtyping (90798). Please do not use this test order unless instructed.
- Add the selected test then save

- Fill out the required fields marked with a red asterisk:

Order Choices	Clinical Info	Response
90850	T7-Specimen Type?*	<input type="text"/>
	Additional Note	<input type="text"/>
90850	Respiratory- Reason for submission?*	<input type="text"/>
90850	C8. Is the patient currently exhibiting signs and/or symptoms of a respiratory infection?	<input type="text"/>
90850	C9. Has the patient been vaccinated against COVID-19?	<input type="text"/>
90850	C7. Relevant Immunizations:	<input type="text"/>

- The required field Respiratory- Reason for Submission will allow you to provide further details on why the specimen is being sent to PHEL. Choose the most relevant option for your test from the dropdown. If unsure, select 'other'

90850	Respiratory- Reason for submission?*	<input type="text"/>
90850	C3. Hospitalization Status	<input type="text"/>
90850	C3A. ICU:	<input type="text"/>
90850	C3B. Admission Date	<input type="text"/>
90850	C8. Is the patient currently exhibiting signs and/or symptoms of a respiratory infection?	<input type="text"/>

- After filling out any additional relevant information, click "Save" to save the test order.
- Print the requisition form** which automatically pops up and pair the samples with their requisition forms in the package to be sent to PHEL. Do not place requisition forms directly in contact with specimen tubes in case a tube leaks or breaks in transit.

Specimen Shipping to PHEL

- Specimens may be shipped to the laboratory for receipt Monday- Friday from 8am – 5pm. NJ PHEL is closed on weekends and state holidays.
- For detailed instructions on how to ship specimens to PHEL, please refer to our guidelines available [here](#).
- Questions regarding shipping to the laboratory can be directed to PHEL.SpecimenReceiving@doh.nj.gov