

Participation In Respiratory Virus Surveillance Initiative

Instructions for Laboratories

NJ Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL) solicits clinical and commercial laboratories to voluntarily submit samples to us for routine testing for respiratory virus surveillance in collaboration with NJ Communicable Disease Service (CDS) and federal partner agencies.

These samples help us determine what viruses are circulating, identify outbreaks, monitor viral evolution, recognize novel or variant strains or emerging infections, as well as assisting with routine assessment of vaccine, test and treatment efficacy. NJ Department of Health publishes weekly [Respiratory Illness Reports](#).

Required Submissions

Specimens that are required for immediate notification to CDS and shipment to PHEL.

- Samples from patients with suspected [avian influenza](#) or other [novel influenza A](#) virus infection
- Any influenza specimen that tests positive for influenza A but tests negative for seasonal influenza A subtypes [i.e., A(H1) and A(H3)] (a.k.a. [Unsubtypeable influenza A](#)).
- Samples from facilities upon request from NJ Communicable Disease Service as a part of a case or outbreak investigation

Participation in Surveillance

Laboratories are asked to submit surveillance specimens for any hospital and clinical laboratory. Contact phel.influenza@doh.nj.gov if your facility is interested in participating. Participation consists of the following:

- Submit Ten (10) specimens per week from patients with symptoms of respiratory viral disease, either pre-screened or unscreened
 - Pre-Screened specimens: If your facility performs influenza and COVID-19 testing, please submit five (5) Influenza positive specimens and five (5) COVID-19 positive specimens per week
 - Unscreened specimens: From symptomatic patients seen in an inpatient setting, emergency department, outpatient setting, or long-term care facilities regardless of test results. If possible, please prioritize specimens from inpatients.

Acceptable Specimens, Storage and Transport

- The preferred respiratory specimen type for most respiratory viral testing is a nasopharyngeal swab collected into 1-3 mL of viral transport media.
- After collection, specimens should be placed at 4°C (refrigerated) and shipped on ice packs if the sample is to be shipped immediately (for delivery to PHEL within 72 hours of collection).
- If a delay in shipment to the laboratory is expected, store clinical specimens frozen at $\leq -70^{\circ}\text{C}$ and transport on dry ice.

- All specimens should be labeled clearly and include a printed requisition form with all required information in the package.
- Click here for more information regarding [Shipping Specimens to PHEL](#)

Incentive program

PHEL can offer participating facilities assistance submitting samples, free collection kits, shipping to the laboratory, and a limited number of free testing kits as a thank you for participating in the program

- Request collection materials at: [Respiratory Surveillance Specimen Collection Materials Request Form](#)