



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Division of Public Health

To: Participants in the Influenza-Like Illness Network (ILINet)
From: Rebecca S. Pelc, Ph.D. Virology/Serology Unit Acting Manager
John Bunting, Viral Culture/Rabies Laboratory Supervisor
Subject: 2018- 2019: **Influenza Laboratory Surveillance (2 pages)**
Date: September 28, 2018

Purpose: The North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH) is one of approximately 85 World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Laboratories located throughout the United States that participate in virologic surveillance for influenza. The most important source of specimens is the Influenza-Like Illness Network (ILINet), a network of volunteer providers from across the state. Testing of specimens submitted by ILINet providers assists North Carolina and the CDC in identifying the types of influenza circulating in your area.

Sample Collection: Participating ILINet providers should collect up to a maximum of 5 (there is no minimum) representative samples **each week** from patients who present with flu-like illness and are **less than 72 hours post onset**. **Specimens should be submitted regardless of whether rapid testing was performed or what results were obtained (positive or negative). Acceptable clinical specimens include upper and lower respiratory tract specimens.** Please be vigorous when swabbing the patient since only samples containing infected cells are likely to yield the virus. (Excellent 'YouTube' videos showing how to properly collect a variety of respiratory specimens can be accessed at www.jointcommission.org/siras.aspx under "Specimen Collection Videos"). Patient swabs must be refrigerated and shipped to the NCSLPH in Styrofoam boxes with cold packs within 24 hours of collection. While each kit can accommodate two to four patient swabs, do not delay shipping beyond 24 hours of collecting the first specimen. Each patient sample must have a complete laboratory submission form. **Incomplete forms may lead to delayed or no testing of your sample.**

Sample Submission and Kits: The NCSLPH will send you collection kits for influenza surveillance at no charge with free return shipping at the beginning of the season, usually sometime during the month of October. Student Health Services will receive four kits, Local Health Departments will receive two kits, and all other sentinel sites who have submitted specimens during the past two seasons will receive two kits. **Please use these kits for collecting samples from patients with influenza symptoms only.** Laboratory submission forms (DHHS #3431) are included in these kits. **To order additional kits free of charge, please call the Laboratory Mailroom at (919) 733-7656 or send an email to william.mcdowell@dhhs.nc.gov.**

Laboratory Testing: NCSLPH will be performing RT-PCR and culture testing on samples this year, however, RT-PCR will be the primary test. Samples positive for influenza by RT-PCR will not be placed into culture unless a culture is specifically requested. Once influenza is established in the community most samples will be tested for influenza using the RT-PCR assay only. A sub-set of RT-PCR negative influenza samples by will be placed into culture for further screening and virus characterization. All samples positive for influenza by RT-PCR will be subtyped (Influenza A) and/or genotyped (Influenza B).

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LOCATION: 225 North McDowell St., Raleigh, NC 27603
MAILING ADDRESS: 1902 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1902
www.ncdhhs.gov • TEL: 919-733-7301 • FAX: 919-733-1020

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Reporting: Final reports will be mailed to the participant at the end of testing, possibly up to 14 days if sample is placed in culture. All influenza results are available online by going to the NCSLPH website at <http://slph.ncpublichealth.com> and selecting the link for "Look Up Submitted Lab Test Results". If you do not have an account, select the link for "Request New User Account", complete the new user sign up form and call 919-733-7837 to activate. **NCSLPH staff do not routinely telephone influenza results** but will gladly call results upon request. Please indicate clearly on the completed test request form that results should be phoned, along with the name and phone number of the individual wishing to receive the results.

It is important that specimens from patients with influenza-like illnesses be submitted for testing year-round. The influenza strain variants that occur near or at the end of the traditional flu season and during the summer months are often the harbingers of the strain that will predominate during next year's flu season. Early detection of these strains aids the World Health Organization in influenza vaccine formulation decisions for the following year. For questions of a technical nature, please contact the Virology Laboratory at 919-733-7544.

cc: Zack Moore	Evelyn Foust	Jean-Marie Maillard
Scott Zimmerman	Anita Valiani	Bill McDowell
Dee Pettit	Kathy Carlton	Regional Lab Consultants