

MLS Laboratory Update: Laboratory Submissions for 2025 – 2026 Viral Respiratory Season

SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

Purpose of this Message:

To provide updated guidance to clinical laboratory partners on clinical sample submission for the 2025-2026 respiratory virus disease seasonal surveillance and to encourage your participation to help inform our Weekly Influenza and Respiratory Activity webpage.

Action Items:

- Review submission requirements, including specimen stability, transport conditions and the updated number of weekly specimen submissions requested for influenza, SARS-CoV-2, and RSV.
- Sign up to contribute to the Weekly Influenza and Respiratory Activity webpage by submitting weekly influenza, RSV, and other respiratory virus testing data from your laboratory. Click this link to provide your contact information by **October 3**: [Influenza Season 2025-2026 Participation Sign Up \(https://forms.office.com/g/TR6qy6KZBF\)](https://forms.office.com/g/TR6qy6KZBF).

Background:

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) conducts seasonal respiratory disease surveillance through case reporting and laboratory submission pathways. The specimens that clinical laboratory partners send to the MDH Public Health Laboratory (MDH-PHL) are an essential part of the program. They enable genotyping, subtyping and sequencing of influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and SARS-CoV-2 to monitor circulating strains in the community.

At the beginning of each respiratory season, MDH-PHL provides guidance on acceptable specimen collection devices, media, shipping conditions, and the ideal number of specimens required for each virus-specific surveillance program.

Additional Information:

Specimen Collection and Transport:

- **Acceptable media:** Viral transport media (VTM) (e.g., VTM, M4, M5, or M6), universal transport media (UTM), saline, phosphate buffered saline (PBS), or liquid Amies.
- **Storage & stability, influenza surveillance:**
 - Refrigerated (2–8°C): stable up to 3 days; must be received by MDH-PHL within 3 days from collection.

- Frozen ($\leq 0^{\circ}\text{C}$): stable up to 7 days; must be received by MDH-PHL within 7 days from collection.
- **Storage & stability, SARS-CoV-2 and RSV sequencing surveillance:**
 - Specimens at refrigeration temperature ($2-8^{\circ}\text{C}$) must be submitted to MDH-PHL within 7 days of collection (preferred), or frozen ($\leq 0^{\circ}\text{C}$) within 7 days of collection and shipped frozen. Specimens can be batched for shipping.

Influenza Specimen Submission:

To keep within its testing capacity for influenza surveillance, **MDH-PHL is only requesting specimens be sent for hospitalized patients or by special request for outbreak or unusual cluster investigation.**

Laboratories should submit **ten** patient specimens that are positive for influenza (either A or B) each week for surveillance purposes. Please use one of the following forms:

- For hospitalized patients with cases of confirmed influenza or influenza like illness, or patients who are deceased following influenza like illness or suspicion of influenza, use the Influenza Hospitalized Surveillance (1492) Submission Form (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhfluform1492.pdf>)
- **If your laboratory is performing onsite influenza testing by RT-PCR:**
 - Submit positive influenza A specimens that are un-subtyped, subtyped as “seasonal H1,” or “indeterminate subtype” to MDH-PHL for further characterization as they may be variant influenza strains.
 - Do not routinely submit positive influenza A specimens that are subtyped as H1N1pdm09 or H3 to MDH-PHL.
 - Do not submit specimens negative by PCR for influenza A and B to MDH-PHL.
- For influenza and influenza-like illness case investigations **directed by MDH epidemiology staff**, use the Influenza Non-Hospitalized Surveillance (493) Submission Form (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhfluform493.pdf>)
- **SENTINEL surveillance** - These facilities are pre-determined. Specimen submission guidelines for these programs have not changed. Please check with your MDH contact with any submission questions for these programs.

SARS-CoV-2 and RSV Submission:

Laboratories performing RSV and COVID-19 testing (rapid antigen or molecular assays) should submit up to 40 positive patient samples per week for each virus.

- To submit SARS-CoV-2 specimens for laboratory surveillance, use the [COVID-19 Special Request Form](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhcovidspecial.pdf) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhcovidspecial.pdf>)
- To submit RSV specimens for laboratory surveillance, use the [General Infectious Disease Laboratory Submission Form](#)

https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdh_lab_submission.pdf) and select 'RSV Sequencing – RSVSEQ' from the Virology Test Requested section of the form.

General Notes:

- Please ensure submitted specimen remnants meet submission guidance found in the [Infectious Disease Laboratory Test Catalog](https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/) (<https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/>). It is not necessary to perform recollection on patients when remnant specimens do not meet submission guidance.
- The guidance found here is intended for laboratory specimen submissions only. Specific respiratory disease case reporting rules and guidance can be found within the [MDH Respiratory Illness Page](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/index.html>)
- Complete forms electronically, print and include with shipment. This ensures use of the most up-to-date submission form and prevents possible delay in processing specimens.
- Please include testing results, methods used (DFA, rapid EIA, PCR, etc.) and name of test kit(s) in the comment section at the bottom of the form.
- MDH-PHL offers the option to make submissions and testing requests electronically including a batch order option for facilities that choose to submit specimens weekly. The submission portal allows for secure, electronic delivery of test orders and results. If interested, please contact:
 - Ginny Dobbins, Health Informatics Supervisor (Ginny.Dobbins@state.mn.us or health.idl.informatics@state.mn.us); Phone: 651-201-4546

Questions: Please contact:

- Dr. Anna K. Strain, Infectious Disease Laboratory Manager (Anna.Strain@state.mn.us or 651-201-5035)

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