



STATE OF MARYLAND  
**DHMH**

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – John M. Colmers, Secretary

Laboratories Administration  
John M. DeBoy, Dr.P.H., Director

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** May 14, 2009 **Lab Update Guidance # 3.1**

**TO:** Medical Laboratory Directors  
Health Officers  
Communicable Disease Directors  
Communicable Disease Staff  
Nursing Directors

**FROM:** John M. DeBoy, DrPH  
Director, Laboratories Administration

**RE:** **Updated Laboratory-Based Influenza Testing**

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Surveillance guidance as outlined on the **Memo Lab Update Guidance # 3.0 dated May 6, 2009** remains unchanged.

As a reminder, the patient surveillance testing is based on two DHMH “Interim Guidance for Specimen Collection for Possible Swine Flu Cases for Sentinel Providers and Local Health Departments” and “Interim Guidance for Specimen Collection for Possible Swine Flu Cases for Providers” updated on 5/5/09 7:48PM . Submission of specimens must be vetted by public health before they can be sent to DHMH Laboratories for testing. **Contact your local Health Department immediately prior to any specimen submissions.** Under this guidance (and algorithm: <http://dhmh.state.md.us/labs>), the DHMH Lab will test specimens **limited to** those from:

1. A patient with a fever >37.8°C (100°F) and respiratory symptoms (cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea) or sepsis-like syndrome **AND** who is:
  - a. Hospitalized;
  - b. A healthcare worker (including EMS);
  - c. Part of an outbreak under investigation by the local health department; or
2. A DHMH-registered sentinel influenza provider [Maryland Outpatient influenza surveillance network (ILINET)] or laboratories participating in the DHMH influenza surveillance program.

**Laboratory questions concerning the submission of specimens that meet these criteria may be directed to the DHMH Lab by telephoning 410-767-6152, 8:00-4:30 M-F, and 410-925-3121 after normal working hours.**

**Specimen Submission and Transport.** Collect and send  $\geq 1.0$  ml respiratory specimens (nasopharyngeal swabs, nasal aspirate; nasal swab plus throat swabs; and lower respiratory aspirates/washes/sputum if appropriate) in viral transport media only, and package it for refrigerated transport (cold packs) to the DHMH Laboratories. Submitters should follow the specimen submission and transport guidelines used for seasonal influenza specimens. In true emergency circumstances where a local health-care employee is not available to serve as courier, an emergency courier pick-up can be coordinated and approved by the DHMH Lab, after consultation with the DHMH physician-on-call or epidemiologist on-call.

**Testing and Reporting Turn-Around-Time (TAT).** The DHMH Lab influenza RT-PCR testing Turn-Around-Time (TAT) is 1-2 working days TAT for influenza screening (non-emergency specimens). Specimens needing confirmatory testing will require another working day.

**H1N1 Influenza Virus Biosafety Guidelines for Laboratory Workers.** The CDC biosafety guidelines for laboratory workers processing or performing diagnostic testing on clinical specimens from patients with possible H1N1 (swine) influenza virus infection or performing viral isolation can be found at [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines\\_labworkers.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines_labworkers.htm).

**Rapid Influenza Tests.** For information on rapid influenza testing refer to [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/rapid\\_testing.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/rapid_testing.htm).

**Private Laboratories Performing Swine Flu Testing.** As testing for swine-origin influenza A/H1N1 virus (S-OIV) moves from federal and state public health laboratories to private testing laboratories, it is imperative that your laboratory be aware of and comply with Code of Maryland Regulations 10.06.01 “Communicable Diseases and Related Conditions of Public Health Importance” available at <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/>). These regulations include “Influenza: novel influenza A virus infection” (Table 1: Reportable Diseases and Conditions and require that your laboratory:

1. Report evidence of S-OIV cases to the:
  - a. Local health department in the jurisdiction in which your laboratory is located, or;
  - b. State health department (Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene) if your laboratory is located outside Maryland; and
2. Submit clinical material (**a minimum of 0.5 ml** of original specimen in viral transport medium or virus isolate) containing evidence of S-OIV to the Department’s public health laboratory within one working day of a positive laboratory finding. If you have questions or concerns about this policy, please call the DHMH Laboratories at 410-767-6100.

**Weekend Service.** Effective May 16, 2009 until further notice, the laboratory administration will work on Saturday morning to clear out specimens received through the DHMH laboratory courier system. However, all other weekend/holidays testing will be on an on-call emergency basis only. (See above for making arrangements for testing). The loading dock will NO longer be open on Saturdays and Sundays to accept specimens.

**For additional questions or concerns** regarding novel H1N1 influenza A testing at the DHMH Laboratories, please contact Dr. Robert Myers or Dr. Maria Paz Carlos at 410-767-6152 during normal business hour or the DHMH Laboratory’s emergency communication number 410-925-3121 after business hours. **This public health situation continues to evolve and we will provide additional information as it becomes available.**

As always, we appreciate your continued vigilance and cooperation.

cc: J. Colmers      S. Adams      D. Paulson      R. Stringer  
R. Myers      M. Carlos      T. Elkin      J. Krick  
A. Romanosky      F. Phillips      P. Sybinsky  
K. Black      D. Blythe