

Specimen Submission Guidelines for Suspect Influenza Virus Infection
Maryland Department of Health Laboratories Administration (MDH Labs) – October 1, 2026

I. Preferred/Acceptable/Unacceptable Specimens

Preferred respiratory specimens for the CDC Influenza SARS-CoV-2 (Flu SC2) Multiplex Assay:

The following should be collected as soon as possible after onset of illness: nasopharyngeal swab, nasal aspirate or wash, or a combined nasopharyngeal swab with oropharyngeal swab. If these specimens cannot be collected, a nasal swab or oropharyngeal swab is acceptable. For patients who are intubated, an endotracheal aspirate should be collected. Bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) and sputum specimens are also acceptable.

Acceptable specimens for the CDC Influenza SARS-CoV-2 (Flu SC2) Multiplex Assay:

- Upper respiratory specimens:
 - Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab
 - Nasal (N) swab
 - NP/N aspirate or washing
 - Oropharyngeal (O) swab
 - Throat (T) swabs
- Lower respiratory tract specimens:
 - Sputum (S)
 - Lower respiratory tract aspirates (TA)
 - Bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL)

Unacceptable specimens CDC Influenza SARS-CoV-2 (Flu SC2) Multiplex Assay (**specimens will be rejected for testing**):

- Respiratory specimens in Rapid Test Lysis Buffer.
- Less than 1ml of Universal Transport Media (UTM) or Viral Transport Media (VTM).
- Calcium alginate swabs.

II. Viral Transport Medium (VTM) Specimen Collection Kit Instructions

Local health departments can order the VTM Specimen collection Kit by calling (443) 681-3777 or by faxing a completed request form (<http://maryland.gov/laboratories/docs>) to (443) 681-3950.

The VTM specimen Collection Kit from MDH Laboratories Administration contains:

- Clear plastic biohazard bag
- Three types of swabs for collection of desired specimen(s): Flocked (NP), Polyester Tipped (N), and Foam (OP/T)
- Tube of VTM
- [MDH Form 4676 Infectious Agents: Culture Detection](#) (paper version). An online fillable version of this is form (MDH 4676) can be found by clicking the “MDH Form 4676 Infectious Agent: Culture Detection text OR by going to the address below:

<https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/docs/MDH%204676%20NEW%202024.pdf>

Upon receipt of the specimen collection kit:

1. Note the expiration date printed on the tube of VTM. **Do not collect any specimens using this medium after the expiration date!**
2. Kits, including VTM, should be stored at room temperature.

III. To collect swab specimens:

1. Collect specimens from patients using the appropriate swab for the specimen being collected.
2. Place swab in VTM tube. **Do not collect any specimens using this medium after the expiration date!**
3. Break swab at the snap point of the shaft, so that the swab fits in the tube. Cap VTM tube, making sure that the cap is securely screwed onto the tube.
4. Wrap parafilm around the cap.
5. Label specimen VTM tube with the patient's name (exactly as it appears on the test request form), date of birth, and collection date.
6. Place the VTM tube in a clear plastic biohazard bag.
7. Fill out the test request form as described below.
8. Place test requisition form in a secondary pouch outside of a clear plastic bag.
9. Properly store collected specimens until transport to MDH Labs.

IV. Laboratory Test Request Form (Infectious Agents: Culture Detection) Instructions (see Influenza [Types A & B] Test Request Sample Form) [MDH Form 4676 Infectious Agents: Culture Detection](https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/docs/MDH%204676%20NEW%202024.pdf) (paper version). An online fillable version of this form (MDH 4676) can be found by clicking the "MDH Form 4676 Infectious Agent: Culture Detection text OR by going to the address below:

1. <https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/docs/MDH%204676%20NEW%202024.pdf>
2. Test requisition form must have the following fields:
 - i. Health Care Provider/Facility.
 - ii. Test Request Authorized By (TRAB) – not required for surveillance.
 - iii. Two unique patient identifiers that also match the appropriately labelled specimen tube (i.e. patient name (first and last is one identifier), date of birth, MRN, etc.).
 - iv. Collection date and time.
 - v. Requested test – if surveillance check the "Submitted for Regulatory Compliance and/or Surveillance" box. If unchecked MDH will treat it as a Clinical/Diagnostic specimen.
 - vi. Specimen source/type.
3. See example on how to fill the [MDH Form 4676 Infectious Agents: Culture Detection](https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/docs/MDH%204676%20NEW%202024.pdf) on page 3.

V. Packaging and Shipping

1. If MDH Labs is to receive specimens <72 hours after collection, store refrigerated and ship on gel cold packs (2–8°C).
2. If MDH Labs is to receive specimens ≥72 hours, store frozen and ship overnight on dry ice (≤-70°C).
3. Please deliver all specimens to the MDH Laboratories Administration at 1770 Ashland Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21205. Alternatively, please deliver to your local health department for shipment to the MDH Laboratories Administration.

For questions, please contact the Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory at (443) 681-3924.