



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

Date: October 31, 2023

To: Medical Laboratory Directors, Local Health Officers and Healthcare Providers

From: David Blythe, MD MPH - *DB*
Director, Infectious Disease Bureau

R.A.M.
Robert A. Myers, Ph.D.
Director, Laboratories Administration

Re: Start of Enhanced Influenza and Viral Respiratory Pathogen Surveillance Program

Monday October 02, 2023 was the start of the 2023-2024 enhanced seasonal influenza surveillance season and MDH has already confirmed the presence of both influenza A and influenza B cases in Maryland. In addition, MDH has identified recent COVID and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) cases as well as other viral respiratory infections. There are also new tools to prevent RSV infections. Therefore, this season, in addition to influenza, we are expanding our surveillance activities in Maryland to target other viral respiratory pathogens your laboratories may be routinely testing for, such as: RSV, parainfluenza viruses, SARS-CoV-2, Adenoviruses, rhino/enteroviruses and human metapneumoviruses. Until seasonal influenza activity becomes widespread, and infections become commonplace, and in accordance with Maryland law, including the Annotated Code of Maryland Health General Article 18-101, 18-102 and 18-205 and the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 10.06.01.03, **we are requesting that laboratories submit remnant positive specimens from ALL cases of respiratory illnesses that have tested positive for influenza A or other viral respiratory pathogens to the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Laboratory** for typing and possible further characterization.

We are requesting the submission of all positive specimens (for influenza A and other viral respiratory pathogens) during the early weeks of the seasonal influenza transmission period to better assist us in quickly identifying and further characterizing the viral respiratory pathogens that are circulating in the state. When activity increases, we will provide additional guidance on scaling back submissions of surveillance specimens.

As always, we request the immediate submission of specimens from any suspected potential novel influenza A virus infections. Submission of specimens from patients with recent swine exposures will be accepted for timely influenza A H3N2v diagnostic testing. Also, arrangements

for priority testing to possibly detect avian influenza viruses, such as influenza A H7N9 and H5N1, can still be made if patients meet recommended clinical and epidemiological criteria (contact your local health department to confirm criteria are met and to coordinate the submission of these specimens to the State Laboratory).

Please visit our website (<https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/Pages/Influenza.aspx>) and select Specimen Submission Guidelines for Suspect Influenza Virus Infection (October 31,2023) for the logistical details of submitting influenza specimens to the MDH Laboratory. You can also contact us at (443) 681-3924 or (443) 681-3905 for questions regarding changes to the surveillance testing program.

Your participation in the enhanced influenza/viral respiratory pathogen surveillance program is greatly appreciated. The specimens submitted to the MDH Laboratory for testing provide valuable insights into the nature and progression of the transmission of viral respiratory pathogens in Maryland and contributes vitally important information to national and international influenza surveillance networks.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding in this matter.

cc: Dr. Kalyanaraman
Dr. David Blythe
Dr. Monique Duwell
Dr. David Crum
Mr. Brian Bachaus
Ms. Curi Kim
Ms. Maya Monroe