



Laboratory Testing Protocol for the Surveillance of Novel H1N1 Influenza and Seasonal Influenza

These guidelines will be revised as the situation evolves.

August 25, 2009

To all Healthcare Providers:

Beginning immediately, The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (EPDPH) will follow newly released protocols for the surveillance of novel H1N1 influenza and the emergence of other novel influenza strains. Testing for influenza conducted by the El Paso Department of Public Health's laboratory will emphasize surveillance in the following areas:

- To detect the geographical distribution and spread of the virus
- To detect H1N1 influenza virus and possible new strain variants of the virus and
- To assist in outbreak situations

Public safety, disease monitoring and containment in our community is a priority for the EPDPH. Specific recommendations in testing and management of H1N1 and seasonal influenza are constantly changing and evolving. The EPDPH is committed to providing current information and services to our community as delineated by our Federal and State authorities. Therefore, in order to make the most effective and appropriate use of the EPDPH laboratory and resources and to support the mission of public health, the EPDPH has revised the criteria for specimens that should be submitted for testing.

Specimens submitted to the EPDPH laboratory for testing must come from one of the following categories of patients:

- Patients hospitalized with influenza symptoms (symptoms are fever greater than 37.8°C (100°) **and** cough and/or sore throat) plus **one or both** of the following conditions:
 - Severe illness such as lower respiratory tract infections or pneumonia
 - Unusual presentation in children, adults >64 years of age, and immuno-compromised individuals

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- Patients who have died with influenza-like illness and have no other known cause of death (specimens must be collected before death)
- Pregnant patients with influenza-like illness
- Individuals with influenza-like illness who are part of a critical public health investigation as identified by the EPDPH.
- Providers who are participants in the El Paso Department of Public Health Influenza Laboratory Surveillance Program. Only enrolled providers will be allowed to submit specimens that do not meet one of the other criteria above.

Qualifying criteria (symptoms or conditions) must be indicated on the submission form to ensure the specimen will be tested. As of August 24, 2009, specimens not meeting one of these criteria will not be tested by the El Paso Department of Public Health laboratory. EPDPH may allow exceptions to this list depending on the specific epidemiological and clinical characteristics of the situation.

Diagnostic testing, if desired and considered appropriate by the provider, could be performed by a commercial laboratory of choice.

I appreciate your help and understanding in regards to this issue and as we approach this coming influenza season, we will continue to make further recommendations in order to be adequately prepared and to provide the most effective way to respond to situations as they arise.

Hector I. Ocaranza, M.D. Health Authority

COLLECTION OF SPECIMENS:

Respiratory Specimens

Respiratory specimens are the only specimen type acceptable for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) laboratory testing for influenza.

Acceptable respiratory specimens include: nasopharyngeal swabs, nasopharyngeal aspirates, nasal swabs, throat swabs, and dual nasopharyngeal / throat swabs. If the swab or aspirate has been used for performing a rapid antigen test, please send an aliquot (1-2 ml) of the original suspension (not



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exposed to test kit reagents) in viral transport media or an additional original specimen swab in viral transport media.

Use the sterile, polyester-tipped, plastic shaft swabs and viral transport media (VTM) for specimen collection. Any commercially available VTM is acceptable for specimen transport. Dacron or rayon-tipped swabs with a plastic shaft or any other commercially available sterile collection system intended for virus isolation may be used. **Calcium alginate swabs, cotton swabs or swabs with wooden shafts are not acceptable for specimen collection as they may inhibit recovery of the virus. Supplies used for Genprobe testing are not acceptable. Specimens submitted using these supplies will be rejected.**

Viral transport media (VTM) tubes should be stored at the specified temperature according to product storage requirement or product insert. If the viral transport media (VTM) tube has been stored frozen, the media should be thawed (at either refrigeration or room temperature) completely before specimen collection. **Do not** heat, microwave, or incubate media prior to use as this may cause inactivation of the virus. **Be sure to check the expiration date of the medium prior to specimen collection. Specimens submitted on expired media will be rejected.**

After specimen has been collected, insert the fiber tip of the swab immediately into the VTM and break off the shaft so that the swab fits completely within the tube. Please tighten the cap securely and place at 4°C immediately in an upright position. Send specimen tubes to El Paso Department of Public Health Laboratory, 4505 Alberta Ave 2nd floor, **as soon as possible after collection. Specimens not shipped within 2 days of collection should be frozen at -70°C and shipped on dry ice. Ensure that the patient name and date of collection are written on each specimen tube that is submitted.**

SPECIMEN LABELING AND SUBMISSION FORM COMPLETION:

Obtain submission form from El Paso Department of Public Health by calling (915) 543-3255. Submission forms must be **completely** filled in for each specimen; incomplete information may cause the specimen to be rejected. Ensure that the patient name and date of collection are written on each specimen tube that is submitted. ***The patient name and date of collection on the specimen tube must match the name and date on the corresponding laboratory form. Qualifying criteria (symptoms or conditions) must be indicated on the submission form to ensure the specimen will be tested.***



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