



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU FOR PUBLIC HEALTH
OFFICE OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND PREVENTION SERVICES
IMMUNIZATION SERVICES DIVISION

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Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet)

The West Virginia Sentinel Provider Program 2025-2026

FAQ for Potential Participants – HOSPITALS

Q: What is an ILI sentinel provider?

Unlike that of many other diseases, influenza surveillance is not focused on determining and quantifying cases with clear cut definitions. Instead, a variety of different surveillance indicators are collected by state and national influenza surveillance programs to determine the timing and relative severity of each influenza season. **ILINet sentinel providers are healthcare providers who report how many visits they have weekly for influenza-like illness (ILI) into the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) system called ILINet.** Nationwide, more than 2,000 providers participate as ILINet sentinel providers every year. In recent years, 50-60 sentinel providers have participated in West Virginia annually.

Q: Who is eligible to be an ILINet sentinel provider?

ILINet sentinel providers can be healthcare providers of any specialty, but it is preferred they are **providers who would likely see patients for respiratory illnesses throughout the year.**

The national syndromic surveillance system (ESSENCE) formerly BioSense made it unnecessary for EDs to manually report ILI into ILINet. For the past couple of seasons, the CDC Influenza Division has made opportunities available for EDs to serve as ILINet sentinel providers again. Under this new mechanism, EDs reporting their syndromic surveillance data to ESSENCE will have their data pulled by CDC staff and migrated into ILINet. Therefore, hospital EDs would no longer need to manually report data into ILINet to participate as ILINet sentinel providers. However, each ED's ESSENCE data must be evaluated and pass the CDC's data validation process before they can become ILINet sentinel providers.

Laboratories of any kind are not eligible. As required by the West Virginia Reportable Disease Rule, they must report certain influenza laboratory results weekly to the West Virginia Influenza Surveillance Coordinator. If your facility has a laboratory with questions about this process, please contact mandy.m.harper@wv.gov.

Q: What are the responsibilities of an ILINet sentinel provider?

- Continue to report facility ILI data to the West Virginia Information Network and/or ESSENCE. CDC staff will pull facility's data from ESSENCE weekly, so there should be little additional effort required of the facility to participate in this effort.
- **Collect respiratory specimens from patients with ILI and submit up to five per week to the state public health laboratory** (West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services) for influenza testing and characterization.
- Communicate with the local health department and/or the influenza surveillance program about important matters (e.g., technical issues, changes in the point of contact, local ILI outbreaks of which the sentinel provider is aware or is managing).

Q: What incentives are there for being a sentinel provider?

- Free specimen collection kits and shipping materials to submit respiratory specimens to OLS, as supply and funding are available.
- Traditional ILINet sentinel providers can request free doses of adult influenza vaccine distributed by the Immunization Service Division (ISD) within Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Service (OEPS). The number of doses provided is based on the sentinel provider's staff size, with an ability to justify additional doses. If interested, these entities are encouraged to make a request for this incentive upon enrollment and ISD staff will take requests into consideration. Adult influenza vaccine offered to providers as part of the ILINet participation are paid for through funds that prohibit healthcare providers for charging a fee for administration. More information about who can be vaccinated with these doses, as well as proper billing and reporting of their administrations, will be communicated to sentinel providers who request doses can be requested from the Immunization Services Division (ISD).

Q: How does a healthcare provider officially become a sentinel provider?

Healthcare providers need to enroll as sentinel providers every year regardless of whether they participated last year or in previous years. Please enroll by completing the ILINet Sentinel Provider enrollment form. Providers are encouraged to complete electronic enrollment form, however, if your facility server blocks the e-form a paper enrollment form is available. Once a provider has completed the enrollment form, the influenza surveillance program will distribute communications and other materials to them.

The CDC Influenza Division does not have a specific Data Use Agreement for this effort, citing that it falls under "appropriate public health use" of ESSENCE data.

Q: Are there opportunities to learn more about this program or influenza surveillance in general?

The West Virginia Influenza Surveillance Program holds an annual webinar every year. **Details about the upcoming webinar will be released at a later date.**

Thank you for considering participation in this program. If you have further questions, please contact the Surveillance Epidemiologist at mandy.m.harper@wv.gov.