

Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) FAQs

The West Virginia Sentinel Provider Program 2026-2027

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.**
- **Laboratories of any kind are not eligible.** As required by the West Virginia Reportable Disease Rule, they must report certain influenza laboratory results via Electronic Laboratory Reporting. If your facility has a laboratory with questions about this process, please contact the respiratory disease epidemiologist at sentinelflu@wv.gov.
- **Large providers (including EDs) (see at least 500 patients per week on average) and electronic providers (use electronic health records to query influenza-like-illness) are only allowed to be enrolled in the summer. Data validations are required for any providers that fall under these two categories above.** This allows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assess their trends and be sure that there is enough data for a provider specific baseline.

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

- The ILINET sentinel provider must complete a new enrollment form for the 2026-2027 flu season, even if they were enrolled in the previous season.
- The ILINET sentinel provider will need to notify their local health department of their enrollment.
- **Report facility data of individuals experiencing ILI by age group each week by Tuesdays at 12 pm. Reporting can be done three ways:**
 - a. Manually entering the data into the ILINET system
 - b. Emergency Departments can have their data pulled from syndromic surveillance
 - i. If you choose to use syndromic surveillance (ESSENCE) pulls, please contact the influenza coordinator at sentinelflu@wv.gov to start the data validation process.

- ii. If you have participated in the ILINET sentinel provider the previous influenza season, data validation is not required again.
- c. Facilities can choose to use West Virginia Health Information Network (electronic health records) to query ILI data which they can report.
 - i. If you choose to use querying through the West Virginia Health Information Network, please contact the influenza coordinator at sentinelflu@wv.gov to start the data validation process.
- **Collect respiratory specimens from patients with ILI and submit 2 specimens per week to the state public health laboratory (West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services) for influenza testing and characterization. There is no pre-testing required. These specimens can be shipped using the free test kits and shipping labels acquired by OLS.**
- 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, specimen submission issues, etc).

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. Testing kits should be ordered before the start of influenza season to ensure that sentinel providers have the materials they need.
- 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 vaccines are capped at 100 doses per facility.

Q: How does a sentinel provider order the adult influenza vaccines?

- The sentinel providers will **complete the order form in this packet** and email it to the Vaccine Program Manager (VPM), at OEPSimmunize@wv.gov.
- The VPM will place the order for the sentinel providers in the Vaccine Ordering Management System (VOMS).
- The vaccines will be delivered to the LHDs.
- The LHD must notify sentinel providers when the vaccines are available for pickup.
- The orders should be placed before the start of flu season.

Q: How does a sentinel provider order free test kits and shipping supplies from OLS?

- Complete the free test kit ordering form which can be found in this packet as well as online at [Test Kit Ordering Form OLS](#)
- Please email the completed order forms via fax to 304-558-2006 or by email to dhholssupplyorder@wv.gov.
- It is suggested for sentinel providers to order supplies before the start of the influenza season.

Q: How does a sentinel provider send specimens to OLS?

- Complete the test request form which can be found in this packet as well as online at [Test Request Form OLS](#)
- Send the test request form with the specimen to OLS.
- Use the free shipping and packaging supplies ordered from OLS to send the specimen.
- Notify the influenza coordinator of the FedEx shipping number and the date when the specimen was shipped so OLS can be notified and prioritize the specimen.

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.
- There are two ways to enroll: filling out the paper form in this packet and emailing it to sentinelflu@wv.gov or completing the electronic enrollment form.

- Providers are encouraged to complete the **electronic enrollment form**, however, if your facility server blocks the e-form a paper enrollment form is available. The electronic enrollment form can be found at [Sentinel Provider Electronic Enrollment Form](#) under “Sentinel Provider Program.”
- Once a provider has completed the enrollment form, the influenza surveillance program will distribute communications and other materials to them, including a sentinel provider survey pre and post flu season.
- 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: What are the benefits of becoming a sentinel provider?

- **Local and national flu insights:** Providers receive regular reports and email updates showing influenza activity in their specific region and across the country. This helps with clinical decision-making.
- **Recognition:** Actively participating sites receive a certificate of appreciation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- **Monitoring vaccine effectiveness:** Tracking influenza cases helps determine how well the current vaccine is protecting the population.
- **Tracking disease activity:** The data you collect is essential for monitoring the spread of influenza and other respiratory illnesses at the local, state, and national levels.
- **Guiding vaccine development:** Surveillance data helps public health officials determine which influenza strains are circulating. This informs decisions on which strains to include in the next season's influenza vaccine.

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 annually. Details will be released mid-summer.
- Thank you for considering participation in this program. If you have further questions, please contact the influenza surveillance coordinator at sentinelflu@wv.gov.