

West Virginia's Virologic Surveillance for Influenza

Instructions for Participating Healthcare Providers and Laboratories



Background

To inform the influenza viruses vaccine selection for the annual influenza vaccine, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and four additional collaborating centers worldwide review a variety of studies that include laboratory surveillance from the previous year. As one of the WHO's collaborating centers, the CDC receives and characterizes thousands of influenza viruses that are identified in state and local public health laboratories each year. West Virginia contributes to this effort by testing respiratory specimens forwarded by eligible participating healthcare providers and laboratories and sending a predetermined subset of influenza positive specimens to the CDC for further studies.

Local healthcare provider and laboratory participation in virologic surveillance is vital for the development of a robust annual influenza vaccine and strong recommendations on influenza antiviral treatments. Eligible healthcare providers and laboratories contribute to this effort by submitting respiratory specimens collected across West Virginia year-round to West Virginia's State Public Health Laboratory, the West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services (OLS).

Additional critical functions to this surveillance are:

- Identification of antiviral resistant influenza viruses
- Identification of novel influenza viruses (some of which may have pandemic potential)
- Broad situational awareness of circulating strains of influenza virus

Specimens Acceptable for Surveillance Testing at OLS During the 2026-2027 Season

- ILINet sentinel providers and hospital laboratories are eligible to submit influenza surveillance specimens.
- Specimens should be collected from patients with influenza-like illness (ILI) or who have tested negative for SARS-CoV-2 and have acute respiratory illness.
- Influenza positive specimens during periods of very low influenza incidence (May to September) are of special interest.
- Unscreened influenza specimens, and negative specimens are also of special interest.
- Specimens from patients with unusual respiratory illness, travel history, or potential exposure to animal-origin viruses should also be submitted.
- Clinical laboratories that perform PCR testing with subtyping capability should immediately submit any specimens that produce unsubtypable test results to OLS.

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Obtaining Specimen Collection and Shipping Materials from OLS

- Free specimen collection kits and FedEx shipping labels may be ordered from OLS by completing the [Influenza/Respiratory Virus Specimen Kit Requisition Form](#) will be filled pending available supply.
- If collection kits are needed immediately, eligible entities, including facilities experiencing outbreaks of acute respiratory illness, may request kits from their local health department.
- Please call (304) 558-3530 if you do not receive the specimen collection kits your facility requested or if you do not receive a response to your request.
- **Do not use requested supplies for testing at commercial entities.** These supplies are funded by federal grants. Facilities that use state provided kits for testing at commercial laboratories will be ineligible to receive further supplies.

Completing the OLS Test Submission Form

- A completed [Microbiology Laboratory Specimen Submission Form](#) must be submitted with each specimen. Specimens arriving without a completed form will be rejected.
- Each specimen must have unique identification on its container matching information on the submission form (e.g., name and date of birth).
- Complete and correct contact information is crucial to ensure that results are communicated in a timely manner.
- Provide all demographics if available.
- In the "Molecular" section of the form, select "Influenza RT-PCR" and "Surveillance."
- **Please document if the specimen was pre-screened for SARS-CoV-2 in the comments section of the Test Submission Form or provide a copy of the lab's test results with the Test Submission Form.** Knowing whether specimens were pre-screened for SARS-CoV-2 informs decision-making about which tests OLS must perform for the specimen and the appropriateness of further testing at the National Influenza Reference Center (NIRC) or the CDC.

Specimen Collection and Shipment

Please review the [Influenza Testing Instructions](#) provided by OLS.

- Use all recommended biosafety precautions when collecting and handling respiratory specimens.
 - Specimens in solutions other than viral transport media (VTM) will not be accepted.
 - Specimens should consist of the original sample including the nasopharyngeal swab.
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- The optimal specimen volume is 3 milliliters (mL), with the absolute minimum required volume being 1 mL.
- Ensure that specimen shipments will not be delivered to OLS or held in a shipping facility over the weekend. It is best to ship next day on Sundays through Thursdays.
- Specimens must be kept refrigerated (2-8°C) and transported on ice packs. If the specimen will not arrive at OLS within 72 hours of collection, then the specimen must be frozen (-70°C) and shipped on dry ice. **OLS does not provide dry ice or courier service.**
- Eligible providers may submit up to five specimens collected weekly for this effort.

Receiving Test Results

- Results will be communicated back to the provider listed on the Test Request Form by fax. Submitters may also call (304) 558-3530 to obtain results.
- OLS tests respiratory specimens for surveillance purposes and the results are not intended for diagnostic purposes. Providers should not delay care while waiting for results from OLS.