

MLS Laboratory Update: Laboratory Submissions for 2026 – 2027 Viral Respiratory Season

OCTOBER 5TH, 2026

Purpose of this Message:

To provide guidance to clinical laboratory partners on sample submissions for the start of the 2026-2027 respiratory virus disease seasonal surveillance on Oct 5th and to encourage your participation to help inform our Weekly Influenza and Respiratory Activity webpage.

Action Items:

- Review submission requirements, including specimen stability, transport conditions and the number of weekly specimen submissions requested for influenza, SARS-CoV-2, and RSV.
- Contribute to the Weekly Influenza and Respiratory Activity webpage by submitting weekly influenza, RSV, and other respiratory virus testing data from your laboratory. Use this link to provide or update your contact information by **October 10th**: [Influenza Season 2026-2027 Participation Sign Up](#).
- Sign up if you wish to receive aggregate influenza surveillance reports by clicking this link to provide contact information: [Contacts for Aggregate influenza Surveillance Reports \(https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/SC0u7JvLeb\)](https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/SC0u7JvLeb).

Background:

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) conducts seasonal respiratory disease surveillance through case reporting and laboratory submissions. The specimens that clinical laboratory partners send to the MDH Public Health Laboratory (MDH-PHL) are an essential part of the program. They enable genotyping, subtyping and sequencing of influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and SARS-CoV-2 to monitor circulating strains in the community.

At the beginning of each respiratory season, MDH-PHL provides guidance on acceptable specimen collection devices, media, shipping conditions, and the ideal number of specimens required to conduct a robust and effective surveillance program.

Additional Information:

Specimen Collection and Transport, Influenza Surveillance:

- **Preferred media:** Viral transport media (VTM) (e.g., VTM, M4, M5, or M6), and universal transport media (UTM).

- **Other media:** saline, phosphate buffered saline (PBS), or liquid Amies are acceptable, though not preferred.
- **Storage & stability, influenza surveillance:**
 - Refrigerated (2–8°C): stable up to 3 days; must be received by MDH-PHL within 3 days of collection.
 - Frozen ($\leq 0^{\circ}\text{C}$): stable up to 7 days; must be received by MDH-PHL within 7 days of collection.

Specimen Collection and Transport, SARS-CoV-2 and RSV Sequencing Surveillance:

- **Preferred media:** Viral transport media (VTM) (e.g., VTM, M4, M5, or M6), universal transport media (UTM), saline, phosphate buffered saline (PBS), and liquid Amies.
- **Other media:** Molecular Transport Media (MTM) and liquid Stuart's.
- **Storage & stability, SARS-CoV-2 and RSV sequencing surveillance:**
 - Refrigerated (2–8°C) must be received by MDH-PHL within 7 days of collection.
 - Frozen ($\leq 0^{\circ}\text{C}$) must be received within 7 days of collection and shipped frozen. Specimens can be batched for shipping.

Influenza Surveillance Specimen Submission:

Beginning October 5th, 2026, MDH-PHL is only requesting specimen submissions from hospitalized patients with confirmed influenza and influenza-like-illness, recently deceased hospitalized patients that had influenza-like-illness or suspected influenza, or by special request for outbreak or unusual cluster investigation.

Laboratories should submit **ten** patient specimens that are positive (rapid antigen or molecular assays) for influenza (either A or B) each week for surveillance purposes. Please complete the following form for submissions:

- [Influenza Surveillance Submission Form](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhflusurveillance.pdf)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhflusurveillance.pdf>)
- **If your laboratory performs onsite influenza testing by PCR:**
 - Please submit positive influenza A specimens that are un-subtyped, subtyped as “seasonal H1,” or “indeterminate subtype” to MDH-PHL for further characterization.
 - Do not submit PCR negative specimens.
 - Immediately report suspected or positive avian influenza A(H5N1) cases or H5 subtyped results, to Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention, and Control at (651-201-5414 or 1-877-676-5414) while patients are still present in clinic to ensure proper specimen collection and submission.

- **SENTINEL surveillance** - These facilities are pre-determined. Specimen submission guidelines for these programs have not changed. Please check with your MDH contact with any submission questions for these programs.

Diagnostic Testing: To request diagnostic influenza and SARS-CoV-2 testing please use the [influenza/SARS-CoV-2 Diagnostic Submission Form](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhflucoviddiagnostic.pdf)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhflucoviddiagnostic.pdf>)

SARS-CoV-2 and RSV Submission:

Laboratories performing RSV and COVID-19 testing (rapid antigen or molecular assays) should submit up to 40 positive patient samples per week for each virus for surveillance purposes.

- To submit SARS-CoV-2 surveillance specimens use the [COVID-19 Surveillance Form](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhcovidsurv.pdf)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhcovidsurv.pdf>)
- To submit RSV surveillance specimens, use the [General Infectious Disease Laboratory Submission Form](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdh_lab_submission.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdh_lab_submission.pdf) and select 'RSV Sequencing – RSVSEQ' from the Virology Test Requested drop down menu in the form.

General Notes:

- Complete forms electronically, print and include with shipment. This ensures use of the most up-to-date submission form and prevents possible delays in processing specimens.
- Submission forms can be found in the links above and on our webpage: [Forms for the Infectious Disease Laboratory](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/forms.html)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/forms.html>)
- Please ensure that all remnant specimens meet MDH submission criteria found within the [Infectious Disease Laboratory Test Catalog](https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/)
(<https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/>)
- It is not necessary to perform recollection on patients when remnant specimens do not meet submission guidance.
- MDH-PHL offers both electronic order entry and report delivery using a submission portal. The submission portal allows for secure, electronic delivery of test orders and results. If interested, please fill out this form: [MDH Infectious Disease Laboratory Electronic Test Ordering and Results \(ETOR\) Onboarding](https://forms.cloud.microsoft/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=RrAU68QkGUWPJricIVmCiATdqVN49iVCgu1wD3e3289URVYOWlkyOEZCQ1kzSFRFTTIIRk8yM0ISMCQIQCN0PWcu&route=shorturl)
(<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=RrAU68QkGUWPJricIVmCiATdqVN49iVCgu1wD3e3289URVYOWlkyOEZCQ1kzSFRFTTIIRk8yM0ISMCQIQCN0PWcu&route=shorturl>) or contact Ginny Dobbins, Health Informatics Supervisor, 651-201-4546, gabby.dobbins@state.mn.us or health.idl.informatics@state.mn.us.
- Surveillance specimens will not receive patient-level result reports. Aggregate results will be made available to submitters on a monthly basis.

Questions: Please contact:

- Michael Valentine, Virology Unit Supervisor (michael.valentine@state.mn.us); Phone: 651-201-3831

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5200.