



GUIDANCE FOR NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS TESTING AT THE GEORGIA PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY (GPHL)

UPDATED 10/01/2009

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and State Health Departments continue to identify human infections with novel H1N1 influenza virus across the United States (for current updates see <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>). In addition, on June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the level of pandemic alert from phase 5 to phase 6, indicating that the scientific criteria for an influenza pandemic have been met.

The Georgia Department of Community Health, Division of Public Health's (DPH) current surveillance goals are to monitor for changes in the severity of H1N1 infections and to identify risk factors for severe illness. To accomplish these goals, we are conducting focused surveillance by continuing traditional surveillance methods (visit <http://health.state.ga.us/epi/flu/> for a detailed explanation of influenza surveillance in Georgia) and instituting the following new H1N1 2009 surveillance testing strategies for the 2009-2010 influenza season:

1. Providers who participate in the ILINet sentinel influenza program outside of the metropolitan Atlanta area may submit up to 3 specimens a week for influenza testing (including H1N1 2009) to the GPHL.
2. The Emerging Infections Program (visit http://www.cdc.gov/ncepid/deiss/about_eip.html for more information) is collecting specimens on patients who are hospitalized with ILI in the 27 EIP hospitals in metro Atlanta for submission to the GPHL.
3. **Any provider** may submit specimens from patients with influenza-like illness (ILI)* who are hospitalized **in the ICU only**.

Laboratory testing for novel H1N1 influenza at the Georgia Public Health Laboratory is used primarily for public health surveillance, **not for primary diagnosis of individual patients**. Patients must meet the above criteria to be tested for H1N1 influenza through the Georgia Public Health Laboratory. Clinicians may also choose RT-PCR testing through a commercial reference laboratory.

***Note: Influenza-like illness (ILI)** is defined as an illness with fever ($\geq 100^{\circ}$ F) AND cough and/or sore throat (in the absence of a known cause other than influenza).

Clinicians **MUST** contact an epidemiologist for testing approval **UNLESS** they are enrolled in the ILINet sentinel influenza program or are caring for patients hospitalized in the eight county metropolitan Atlanta EIP study area. Approval should be obtained by contacting your local health department (<http://health.state.ga.us/h1n1flu/pdf/DistrictEpiContacts.pdf>) or the Division of Public Health Acute Disease Epidemiology Section (404-657-2588). After business hours, specimens can be collected and held in the refrigerator at 4°C until Public Health can be consulted.

SAMPLES SUBMITTED DIRECTLY TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY WITHOUT THE NECESSARY APPROVAL, APPROPRIATE SPECIMEN HANDLING, AND/OR THE APPROPRIATE SUBMISSION FORM MAY NOT BE TESTED.

Specimen Collection:

(Please be sure to follow appropriate infection control guidance during collection of specimens. Current infection control guidance is available at <http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/>)

The following should be collected as soon as possible after illness onset: nasopharyngeal swab, nasal aspirate or a combined nasopharyngeal swab with oropharyngeal swab. If these specimens cannot be collected, a nasal swab or oropharyngeal swab is acceptable. For patients who are intubated, an endotracheal aspirate or bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) specimen should also be collected. **Nasal washes will not be accepted for testing.** Specimens should be placed into sterile viral transport media (VTM) and immediately placed on ice or cold packs or at 4°C (refrigerator) for transport to the laboratory. Do not freeze.

Note: Ideally, swab specimens should be collected using swabs with a synthetic tip (e.g. polyester or Dacron®) and an aluminum or plastic shaft. Swabs with cotton tips and wooden shafts are not recommended. Specimens collected with swabs made of calcium alginate are not acceptable. The swab specimen collection vials must contain 1-3ml of viral transport medium (e.g. containing, protein stabilizer, antibiotics to discourage bacterial and fungal growth, and buffer solution), such as M4RT or the [BD Universal Viral Transport System](#).

Fact sheets for healthcare providers and patients regarding the interpretation of the Influenza RT-PCR test may be found at:

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/eua/pdf/eua_amendment_swine_healthcare.pdf.

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/eua/pdf/eua_amendment_swine_patients.pdf

Storing and Shipping Specimens:

- Respiratory specimens can be kept at 4°C for up to 3 days.
- Do not ship specimens to arrive Saturday or Sunday.
- After screening, District or State Epidemiology will provide the appropriate Georgia Public Health Laboratory Submission Form.
- Please package samples for Category B shipping to the Georgia Public Health Laboratory:
 - Wrap the primary specimen tube(s) in bubble wrap or some other cushioning material and secure with tape.
 - Place the specimens in a plastic bag with a biohazard symbol, place an absorbent sheet in the bag and expel the air before sealing the bag.

- Place the sealed bag in a second sealable, water resistant bag (e.g. a tyvek envelope), expel the air and seal the bag.
- Place the cold pack in the bottom of a Styrofoam container, put specimen, along with the appropriate submission form, in the shipper along with a list of the contents.
- Place the styrofoam shipping container in an outer cardboard box, seal the box and be sure the following markings/labels are placed on the box:

A) Triangular 3373 label;

B) Category B Biological Substance label;

C) Complete shipper's address, including the name and telephone number of a contact person who can be contacted in case the package is damaged;

D) Georgia Public Health Laboratory address:

Georgia Public Health Laboratory

1749 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033

If you have any questions, please call the Division of Public Health (404-657-2588 during normal working hours or 1-866-PUB-HLTH after hours) or your local health department (<http://health.state.ga.us/h1n1flu/pdf/DistrictEpiContacts.pdf>) for information. Additional information can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>.