



STATE OF MARYLAND
DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – John M. Colmers, Secretary

Laboratories Administration
John M. DeBoy, Dr.P.H., Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 26, 2009

TO: Medical Laboratory Directors
Health Officers
Communicable Disease Directors
Communicable Disease Staff
Nursing Directors

FROM: Dr. John M. DeBoy
Director, Laboratories Administration

RE: **Enhanced Laboratory-Based Influenza Surveillance Specimen Requests**

As part of the Maryland DHMH response to the public health emergency of the new variant of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infections, the DHMH Laboratories Administration (DHMH Lab) has expanded Maryland's laboratory-based influenza surveillance. It is prioritizing its surveillance efforts for any possible infections with the swine influenza A(H1N1) viruses that have been detected in North America, and other locations in the United States and Mexico. (Additional background information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>).

To date, there have been no known cases of this variant of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection in Maryland. However, we are requesting the following enhance influenza surveillance until further notice:

1. **Submit all Influenza A positive specimens or isolates to the DHMH Laboratories for confirmation and typing.**
 - a. **Rapid Testing:** Please forward **all** specimens positive for influenza A virus to the DHMH Laboratory for confirmatory testing and further subtyping. Please send ≥ 1.0 ml of the specimen **before** treatment with testing reagents or send a second specimen in any commercially available virus transport medium.
 - b. **Viral Culture and PCR Laboratories:** Please forward **all** specimens positive for influenza A virus to the DHMH Laboratories for confirmatory testing and further subtyping. Please submit at least 1.0 ml. of **all** influenza A positive original specimens and cell culture isolates that were received after April 1 and held at freezer temperatures (if they were not previously submitted to the DHMH Laboratories).

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2. **Submit respiratory specimens from individuals who present influenza-like illness (ILI) and meet CDC's travel and/or occupational risk exposures to swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection for testing at the DHMH Laboratories.** The interim guidance on case definitions to be used for investigations of swine influenza A (H1N1) cases are posted on the CDC website. Please refer to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu> for the latest update. Submission of specimens from such cases must be coordinated with public health before specimens can be sent to DHMH Laboratories for testing. Contact your local Health Department immediately for such cases. If you have tried and are unable to reach your local health department contact the DHMH Epidemiologist on-call at 410-767-6700 during normal business hours and at 410-795-7365 after business hours to arrange for expedited testing at the DHMH Laboratories.

Specimen Submission and Transport. Collect and send ≥ 1.0 ml respiratory specimens (nasopharyngeal/throat swabs, and lower respiratory aspirates/washes/sputum if appropriate) in viral transport media only, and package it for refrigerated transport (cold packs) to the DHMH Laboratories. Submitters should follow the specimen submission and transport guidelines used for seasonal influenza specimens. Testing sites and laboratories should use MD DHMH Laboratories requisition forms for confirmatory or identification testing. **Do not submit specimens from swine influenza suspect cases without prior notification to the DHMH Laboratories.** These specimens will receive special handling and expedited testing. In rare circumstances, emergency courier pick-up can be coordinated through the DHMH Laboratories should the situation warrant.

Biosafety Guidelines for Laboratory Workers. The CDC biosafety guidelines for laboratory workers processing or performing diagnostic testing on clinical specimens from patients with suspected swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection or performing viral isolation can be found at http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidelines_labworkers.htm. We highly recommend that point of care rapid influenza tests from swine influenza suspect patients be performed at a minimum under biosafety level-2 (BSL-2) conditions, and that you refrain from inoculating specimens from suspect cases into cell culture until swine influenza A(H1N1) virus can be ruled-out at the DHMH Laboratories.

Submit Specimens from A Suspect Case Regardless of Rapid Test Results. Please submit specimens from suspect case regardless of rapid influenza detection test results. The performance characteristics of the rapid tests for the swine influenza A virus is not currently known. Additional information will be provided as it becomes available.

For additional questions or concerns regarding swine influenza A(H1N1) testing at the DHMH Laboratories, please contact Dr. Robert Myers or Dr. Maria Paz Carlos at 410-767-6151 during normal business hour or the DHMH Laboratory's emergency communication number 410-925-3121 for after hours. **This public health situation is rapidly evolving. We will provide additional information as it becomes available in future inquiries.**

As always, we appreciate your continued vigilance and cooperation.

cc: J. Colmers S. Adams
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K. Black D. Blythe
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