



Date: June 6, 2024

BCD 2024-02
Replaces BCD 2023-01

To: Wisconsin Clinicians, Infection Preventionists, Tribal Health Centers, and Local Health Departments, HERC Directors, Coroners/Medical Examiners

From: Ryan Westergaard, MD, Ph.D., Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist for Communicable Disease

Influenza Testing and Variant Influenza A Virus Detection

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Background

The 2024 city and county fairs and agricultural events season in Wisconsin is about to begin. During recent seasons, swine exhibitions at agricultural fairs and other direct or indirect exposure to swine have been associated with human infections caused by variant influenza A viruses that include influenza A/H3N2v, A/H1N2v and A/H1N1v.

In past spring and summer seasons, outbreaks of avian influenza A/H5N1 have been identified in wild birds and commercial and backyard bird flocks nationwide, including Wisconsin. Recently, influenza A/H5N1 has also been identified in cattle and other mammal species on farms in multiple states. Since April 1, 2024, CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has confirmed three human HPAI A(H5N1) infections among farm workers who had been exposed to infected dairy cattle in Texas and Michigan. Two of the human cases only had conjunctivitis as the symptom. The third case had acute respiratory illness symptoms. While the overall risk of human infection remains very low, these exposures to the HPAI A(H5N1) bird flu virus are the first instances of likely mammal to human transmission.

Testing criteria

It is important for clinicians to consider influenza testing among patients with acute respiratory illnesses (ARI) or conjunctivitis who within one week prior to illness onset report direct exposure to swine or cattle (showing, raising, feeding, cleaning waste, or having physical contact), or indirect exposure to swine or cattle (in a building that houses swine or cattle or attendance at an event where swine or cattle are present). ARI is defined as any two of the following conditions: fever, cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea, or nasal congestion.

In-house testing, including rapid influenza diagnostic tests to identify influenza A, are discouraged for samples from patients with known contact with affected birds or dairy cattle. Specimens will be tested at no charge by the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) with the prior approval of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health (DPH). Courier services are available for shipment of specimens to the WSLH at no charge (see below).

Specimen collection

- Patients who meet the testing criteria for ARI should have a nasopharyngeal (NP; preferred), oropharyngeal, or nasal swab collected and placed into one tube of viral transport media (VTM) and sent to the WSLH for influenza PCR testing.
- Patients with conjunctivitis must have two swabs collected: an NP swab in VTM and a conjunctival swab collected and placed into a separate tube of VTM. To sample the conjunctivae, clinicians should use a flocked swab with a flexible shaft (the same swab types used for NP testing). To collect eye specimens, reflect back the lower eyelid of the affected eye and roll the swab across the conjunctiva. If sampling both eyes, a separate swab should be used for each eye. An [instructional video](#) is available online.
- Specimens submitted for testing must include a completed WSLH Enhanced Surveillance Requisition Form. A lab requisition form will be sent by the WSLH to the submitter upon approval of testing by DPH.

To obtain approval for testing or if you have questions regarding this memo, please contact Wisconsin Influenza Surveillance Coordinator Thomas Haupt, at 608-266-5326, or call the Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.

Specimen packaging (WSLH Kit # 18 or equivalent)

- **Triple package as “Biological substance, Category B / UN 3373” if classified as Category B.**
- Securely tape the cap of the specimen container, wrap specimen with absorbent material; place the specimen vial into a biohazard bag; place the completed requisition form into the outer pocket of the bag.
- Place the bagged specimen and form in the Styrofoam mailer with a frozen cold pack and cushioning.
- Replace lid on the Styrofoam/cardboard box; close and securely tape the cardboard box shut.
- Attach the WSLH address label to the package:
**Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene
Specimen Receiving, Communicable Disease Division
2601 Agriculture Drive
Madison, WI 53718**
- Attach the “*Biological substance, Category B / UN 3373*” label to the package.
- Attach your *return address* label.
- Include the *name and telephone number* of the person who knows the content of the package (requirement) with the return address.

Specimen collection and shipping supplies

- Specimen collection and shipping supplies are available at no cost to surveillance sites.
- Please contact the WSLH Clinical Orders Dept. at **800-862-1088** or email HMspeimenreceivingclinicalordersstaff@slh.wisc.edu to order supplies.

Shipping arrangements

- The WSLH has a courier contract with Purple Mountain Solutions (formerly Gold Cross) for shipment of specimens to the WSLH, with charges billed to the WSLH. **You are not required to ship via Purple Mountain unless you wish to have the transport charges billed to the WSLH.***
- Specimens will be picked up during regular working hours, but you must confirm the time with the Purple Mountain scheduler. Call by noon for same day pick up.
- Specimens will be delivered to the WSLH the following day. **If you must ship on Fridays or on the day before a holiday, include an extra frozen cold pack.**
- All package preparation should be completed before the courier arrives.
- Contact Purple Mountain directly to arrange for a pick-up:
 - **Call: 800-990-9668**
 - **Website: <https://purplemountainsolutions.com/>**
 - Same day delivery may be available for specific high priority specimens. However, **pre-approval from WSLH is required by calling the customer service dept. at 800-862-1013.**

***NOTE: This fee exempt courier account is for these surveillance specimens or other specimens specifically requested by WSLH. Fee exempt courier is not available for transport of unapproved or unrequested samples.**