

## LABORATORY BULLETIN

2009 – April - 27

Bulletin # 2009– 4

To: Medical Officers of Health, Infectious Disease & Community Physicians

Re: Laboratory Testing for Travel Related Influenza-Like Illness

**PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE**

**Background:** A novel swine influenza type A (subtype H1N1) virus is circulating in Mexico and the United States. Canadian cases, among returning travelers from these areas, have been identified. In these patients, many have presented as a mild respiratory illness with recovery, similar to seasonal influenza.

Testing for this agent is restricted to returning travelers and their immediate contacts if they have symptoms consistent with influenza-like illness.

Samples collected more than 5 days after onset of symptoms/illness will most likely test as negative and should not be sent.

### **Mild respiratory illness NOT requiring hospitalization:**

- Collect a nasopharyngeal swab into Universal (Viral) Transport medium, stored at room temperature or preferably in the fridge (not frozen). If a nasopharyngeal sample cannot be collected, a less satisfactory alternative is a throat swab also sent in Universal Transport medium.
  - Do not send sputum or nasal swabs.
  - Nasopharyngeal or throat swabs sent in medium other than Universal (Viral) Transport medium are unsuitable for testing
- Order “influenza testing”.

The following information must be completed on a Provincial Laboratory requisition to prevent incomplete testing or delays in reporting:

- 1) Patient name, date of birth, address, gender, and Alberta Health Care number
- 2) Submitter Information: ordering physician and complete clinic address with phone number
- 3) Date of onset of illness and symptoms (complete History Box)
- 4) Date sample collected
- 5) Sample type – nasopharyngeal or throat swab
- 6) Country of Travel and Dates of Travel (eg. Mexico – April 1 to April 10 2009)
- 7) Enter EI 236 on requisition

Testing Algorithm: Based upon the travel history provided, the Provincial Laboratory will decide on the optimum algorithm for testing for this or other respiratory agents.

Result Reporting:

- Negative results will be available after 48 hours from receipt by the Provincial Laboratory – do not contact the laboratory before this time.
- Positive influenza A results, may take up to 72 hours for confirmation and will be phoned to the submitter (if phone number is provided).
- Results will be available on Alberta Netcare if the patient’s Alberta Health Care number is provided.

**Note:** Patients that test positive for this novel virus will be automatically reported to the Chief Medical Officer of Health for public health tracking.

Supplies: The following are available from your local laboratory and the Provincial Laboratory.

- Flocked nasopharyngeal swabs
- Rayon throat swabs
- Universal (Viral) Transport medium
- Provincial Laboratory requisitions
- Biosafety bag (for transporting samples)

Transport

- Send ONLY ONE sample per biosafety bag, with the sample and absorbent material sealed in the closeable side of the bag, and the requisition in the adjoining open pouch. Samples can be sent at ambient temperature if within 8 hours of collection. If more than 8 hours – use a Cold-Pak or ice-pack to maintain the integrity of the sample and virus.
- If multiple samples are sent in the same bag and if one or more leak, ALL of the samples will be discarded.

**Severe Respiratory Illness (SRI):** Contact your local Medical Officer of Health for guidance on sample collection and submission. Guidelines for specimen submission in this setting is in document entitled “Severe Respiratory Illness Rule-Out- Laboratory Testing” (see attached).

**Questions:**

Contact the Virologist-on-call:  
Edmonton Laboratory at (780) 407 7121  
Calgary Laboratory at (403) 944 1200



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