



Date: July 9, 2025

BCD 2025-02 Replaces BCD 2024-02

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

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Influenza Testing for Novel Influenza and Variant Influenza A Viruses

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Background

The 2025 city and county fairs and agricultural events season in Wisconsin is underway. 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(H3N2)v, A(H1N2)v, and A(H1N1)v.

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. Since September 2022, 40 infected poultry flocks have been detected in Wisconsin with the last detection occurring in April 2025. Influenza A(H5N1) has also been identified in cattle and other mammal species on farms in multiple states. To date, there have been no detections in Wisconsin dairy herds. Since April 1, 2024, CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has confirmed 70 human influenza A(H5N1) infections in the U.S. among farm workers or people involved with depopulation of infected birds, including one case in a Wisconsin resident.

While the overall risk of human infection remains very low, exposures to influenza A(H5N1) avian flu virus and swine flu variant viruses can lead to human infections.

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), **or**
- Direct exposure to A(H5N1) infected birds (raising, feeding, cleaning waste, or having physical contact).

ARI is defined as any **two** of the following conditions: fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, 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 WSLH at no charge (see below).

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

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 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.
- Specimen collection and shipping supplies are available at no cost for the testing of influenza variant suspects. Please contact the WSLH Clinical Orders Department at **800-862-1088** or email HMspecimenreceivingclinicalordersstaff@slh.wisc.edu to request supplies.
- Specimens submitted for testing must include a completed WSLH Enhanced Surveillance Requisition Form. A lab requisition form will be sent by WSLH to the submitter upon approval of testing by DPH.

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, and 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.

Shipping arrangements

- The Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) has a courier contract with Purple Mountain Solutions for shipment of specimens to WSLH at no charge to the sender. **You are not required to ship via Purple Mountain unless you wish to have the transport charges billed to 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 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**
 - [Purple Mountain Solutions website](#)
 - Same day delivery may be available for specific high priority specimens. **However, pre-approval from WSLH is required by calling the customer service department at 800-862-1013.**

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