COUNTY OF MONTEREY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
Elsa Jimenez, Director of Health
Administration Animal Services Behavioral Health Clinic Services
Emergency Medical Services Environmental Health Public Administrator/Public Guardian Public Health

County of Monterey Public Health Laboratory (MCPHL) Interim Guidance on Testing and Specimen Collection for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1)

Updated April 25, 2024

Enhanced HPAI A(H5N1) Surveillance Criteria

While risk of HPAI A(H5N1) infection in humans currently remains low, County of Monterey Health Department (MCHD) is conducting enhanced surveillance. MCHD requests that specimens from the following individuals be submitted to the MCPHL for additional surveillance testing:

1) All influenza A positive patients (inpatient and outpatient) who report one of the following exposures:
    a. Contact with wild birds, wild mammals, domestic poultry, cattle and/or other farm animals in the 10 days prior to symptom onset, or
    b. Close contact with a person who is ill or has recently been ill who had contact with wild birds, wild mammals, domestic poultry, cattle, and/or other farm animals in the 10 days prior to symptom onset.
2) All influenza A positive patients with severe illness requiring ICU admission.
3) All influenza A positive patients who expire.

MCHD requests these specimens for enhanced surveillance purposes. Therefore, facilities will not be billed for surveillance testing on individuals who meet at least one of the above three criteria. Guidance for specimen collection, storage, shipping, and requisition is outlined below.

Specimen Collection

- Specimens should be obtained as soon as possible after illness onset, ideally within 7 days of illness onset.
- MCPHL performs HPAI screening on human specimens only.

Specimen Types **(Swabs)**

For individuals who meet clinical and epidemiologic criteria for Influenza A(H5N1) with:

Respiratory illness: preferably two specimens should be collected.

1. Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport media (VTM) **(REQUIRED)**
   AND
2. A combined nasal swab (NS) and Oropharyngeal (OP) swab (i.e. two swabs placed in one VTM tube)

Additional respiratory specimens may be submitted if available: nasal aspirates, bronchoalveolar lavage, and tracheal aspirate in sterile collection tube.

Conjunctivitis (with or without respiratory symptoms)

- Collect the following two specimens:
  - Conjunctival swab in VTM (one swab placed in one tube)
    AND
  - NP swab in VTM (one swab placed in one tube)

Collection materials:

- 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 should contain 1-3ml of sterile viral transport medium.

Specimen Storage

- Clinical specimens should be placed at ≤-20°C (for no more than 7 days) or at ≤-70°C and transported promptly. Avoid freezing and thawing specimens.

Shipping Specimens to MCPHL

- Specimens should be transported to the laboratory within 48 hours of collection if possible.
  - Short-term storage: Store in refrigerator for no more than 4 days.
  - Long-term storage: Store frozen at ≤-20°C (for no more than 7 days) or at ≤-70°C and transport. Avoid freezing and thawing specimens.
- All specimens should be labeled clearly and include patient name, date of birth, and date collected.

Specimen Requisition Form

- MCPHL standard requisition form is available at: https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/public-health/public-health-lab.
- Complete the submitter information on the upper left-hand side of the form. Be sure to include submitting organization name, address, and ordering physician.
- Complete the patient information and collection information. Be sure to include patient last name, first name, date of birth, sex and date and time specimen was collected.
- Indicate specimen source type.
- **In the "Priority" section, mark the "Epidemiologic Investigation" box and write in "flu surveillance."**
- **Mark "Influenza Panel PCR" as test ordered.**
- Fold requisition form and place in the outside sleeve of the biohazard bag. Please do **not** place paperwork inside the biohazard bag.
- Failure to meet these requirements may lead to delays in testing.

Specimen Testing

- MCPHL performs **Influenza A/B typing and subtyping** using the CDPH Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory (VRDL) RUO rRT-PCR assay. This assay does not identify H5N1.
- Specimens testing **positive for Influenza A that are unsubtypeable or deemed as inconclusive subtypes** using the VRDL assay will be shipped to VRDL for H5 testing.

Additional Information

- A specimen is only **presumptively positive** for influenza A/H5 if both targets (InfA, H5) are positive. Once confirmed as H5 by CDC, it should be handled as a **Select Agent**.
- CDC, APHL and VRDL currently does not have information on the test performance of commercial diagnostic lab tests for N5 detection.

Laboratory Contacts

- Laboratory main line: 834-755-4516
- Donna Ferguson, Laboratory Director
    - Office: 831-755-4636
- Rawni Lunsford, Assistant Laboratory Director
    - Office: 831-755-4769