



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Public Health

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Memo

To: Submitters to the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health

From: William A. Glover II, PhD, D(ABMM), MLS(ASCP), Assistant Laboratory Director

Date: October 21, 2025

Re: Guidance for Non-RESPNET Laboratories for the 2025-2026 Respiratory Season

This memo serves as guidance to Non- Respiratory Virus Hospitalization Surveillance Network (Non-RESPNET) laboratories performing testing in North Carolina for Influenza during the 2025-2026 respiratory season.

Background

Each season the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH) conducts virologic surveillance for influenza. The molecular virology laboratory at NCSLPH performs testing on specimens received from clinical partners each week utilizing the CDC Influenza SARS-CoV-2 Multiplex, CDC Influenza A Subtyping and Influenza B Genotyping assays. A subset of confirmed positive specimens are submitted biweekly to a National Influenza Reference Center (NIRC) for additional antigenic and genetic characterization or to the National SARS-CoV-2 Strain Surveillance (NS3) program to track viral evolution. Specimens received from our partners play an important part of meeting national right size goals for NC to ensure comprehensive virologic surveillance. Virologic surveillance in North Carolina includes local health departments, primary care providers and hospital/clinical laboratories. Virologic surveillance allows 1) determination of influenza strains included in the next season's influenza vaccine, 2) monitoring for variant viruses and novel influenza viruses of pandemic potential 3) surveillance for resistance to antiviral medications and 4) improved understanding of the spread of different respiratory strains across the state.

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LOCATION: 4312 District Drive, Raleigh, NC 27607

MAILING ADDRESS: 1918 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1918

www.ncdhhs.gov • <http://publichealth.nc.gov> • <https://slph.dph.ncdhhs.gov/> • TEL: 919-733-7834 • FAX: 919-733-8695

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Specimen Requests

Non-RespNet clinical laboratories in North Carolina performing testing for respiratory pathogens are requested to submit Influenza and SARS-CoV-2 positive specimens to NCSLPH during the respiratory season. We ask that clinical labs submit:

1. Up to 10 (no minimum) positive influenza specimens each week inclusive of:
 - a. All influenza deaths
 - b. All specimens that are unable to subtype if tested on an assay that subtypes
2. Up to 5 (no minimum) positive SARS-CoV-2 specimens each week for genomic surveillance

Specimen Submission/Shipping

Acceptable surveillance specimens include upper respiratory specimen (nasopharyngeal or nasal swabs) and oropharyngeal swabs in viral transport media (VTM) or universal transport media (UTM).

NCSLPH recommends clinical laboratories store residual influenza specimens at $\leq -70^{\circ}\text{C}$ for enhanced surveillance purposes. These frozen specimens should be shipped to NCSLPH on dry ice.

- Alternatively, frozen specimens may be shipped to NCSLPH on frozen ice packs for receipt and testing within 7 days of collection. Please write “Shipped Frozen” on the submission form.

Surveillance specimens may also be stored at $2-8^{\circ}\text{C}$ and shipped on frozen ice packs for receipt at NCSLPH <72 hours after collection

NCSLPH has a electronic spreadsheet template with minimal demographic fields available for sites to utilize for this surveillance effort. Alternatively, a [Virology submission form](#) can be utilized for each specimen. Please contact slph.flu@dhhs.nc.gov for issues with the electronic spreadsheet for your laboratory.

If specimens are submitted to NCSLPH using a commercial courier (FedEx or UPS), specimens must be packaged to meet [UN3373 Category B packaging requirements](#). FedEx labels to support shipping are available from SLPH. To request shipping labels, please contact slph.flu@dhhs.nc.gov.

Specimens can also be sent to NCSLPH using the NC DOA Medical Courier through coordination with your Local Health Department. Please contact your local health department prior to dropping off specimens to ensure specimens meet [DOA Medical Courier Packing and Shipping requirements](#).

Reporting

NCSLPH does not return individual results to the submitter. Instead, weekly aggregate subtyping results can be found on the [NC DHHS respiratory dashboard](#) under “Influenza Positive Tests”.

For any additional questions or information please contact NCSLPH at slph.flu@dhhs.nc.gov.