



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

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Laboratory of Public Health

Memo

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

From: Scott M. Shone, PhD, HCLD (ABB), Director, State Laboratory of Public Health

Date: August 17, 2026

Re: 2026-2027 Respiratory Pathogen Surveillance Guidance

This memo serves as guidance to laboratories performing testing for respiratory pathogens in North Carolina during the 2026-2027 season.

Background

Each year the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH) conducts virologic surveillance for influenza variants. Virologic surveillance in North Carolina relies on participation from Local Health Departments, primary care providers and hospital/clinical laboratories.

The molecular virology laboratory at NCSLPH performs testing on specimens received from clinical partners 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 for additional antigenic and genetic characterization or to the National SARS-CoV-2 Strain Surveillance program to track viral evolution. Specimens are also submitted for RSV genomic surveillance.

Specimens received from clinical laboratory partners play an important part of meeting national “Right Size” goals for NC to ensure comprehensive virologic surveillance. This virologic surveillance supports the following public health goals:

- determination of strains included in the next season’s influenza vaccine.
- monitoring for variant viruses and novel influenza viruses of pandemic potential.
- surveillance for resistance to antiviral medications.
- improved understanding of the spread of different respiratory strains across the state.

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH • STATE LABORATORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Specimen Requests

Clinical laboratories in North Carolina performing testing for respiratory pathogens are requested to submit Influenza, SARS-CoV-2, and RSV positive specimens to NCSLPH during the respiratory season.

Clinical laboratories should 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**
- 3. One (1) positive RSV specimen each month**

Note: clinical laboratories participating in RESP-Net meet these requests through their RESP-Net activities.

Respiratory season includes the peak season, shoulder season (acceleration/deceleration phase), and summer/off season. The goal for this virologic surveillance is to have representative specimens for all phases throughout the calendar year. Please submit positive specimens as they occur in your facility.

Specimen Submission/Shipping

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

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

- Alternatively, frozen specimens may be shipped to NCSLPH on fully 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.
- If possible, specimens should be shipped early in the week to avoid weekend transportation delays.

NCSLPH can provide an electronic spreadsheet template with the minimum demographic fields for submitters to utilize for this surveillance effort. Alternatively, a [Virology submission form](#) can be completed and returned with each specimen. Please contact slph.flu@dhhs.nc.gov to receive an 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 patient results to submitters. This year, NCSLPH will generate facility-specific reports throughout the season to provide data summaries for clinical laboratory partners on the surveillance specimens they submitted to NCSLPH. Weekly aggregate subtyping results can also be found on the Communicable Disease Branch's [NC DHHS respiratory dashboard](#).

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