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

Date: January 14, 2025 - UPDATED

Re: REVISED Specimen Collection Guidance for Individuals with Known HPAI Exposure

This memo provides an update to the specimen collection guidance for individuals with known exposure to novel influenza A(H5N1) highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) that was originally shared in the Provider Memo for Enhanced Surveillance and Testing for Novel and Variant Influenza, dated July 12, 2024.

The following guidance is provided for general reference. Prior approval for testing is required. Clinicians should contact the Epidemiologist on Call at 919-733-3419 to discuss a specific patient displaying clinically compatible symptoms with known HPAI exposure. Laboratories should contact the BTEP Duty Phone at 919-807-8600 to coordinate prior to specimen collection and submission to the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH). Specimens should be obtained for Influenza A/H5 testing as soon as possible after illness onset.

Specimen submission guidance has been updated to allow for the submission of specimens in both **Viral Transport Media (VTM) and Universal Transport Media (UTM)** for Influenza and Influenza A/H5 testing. All specimens must be collected in **Viral Transport Media (VTM)** or **Universal Transport Media (UTM).** For patients with known exposures who are symptomatic, please collect the following specimen types based upon the patient's symptoms:

- **Patient with respiratory symptoms only**
  - Vial 1: Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab
  - Vial 2: Oropharyngeal swab AND nasal swab (both swabs in same vial)
- **Patient with conjunctivitis (with or without respiratory symptoms):**
  - Vial 1: Conjunctival swab
  - Vial 2: Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab
  - Vial 3: Oropharyngeal swab AND nasal swab (both swabs in same vial)

Use a synthetic tipped, sterile swab of appropriate size with a plastic or metal shaft. Do not use a cotton swab, calcium alginate swab, or swab with a wood shaft.

- **Label the vial containing the swab(s) completely:**
    - Specimen Type
    - Patient Name
    - Date of Birth
    - Date of Collection

- **Store specimen properly until shipment:** Refrigerate at 2-8°C for immediate shipment. Freeze ≤-70° C for storage longer than 48 hours.

- **Completely fill out** the Virology submission form. Select "Influenza" and write "HPAI"

If specimens are submitted to NCSLPH using a commercial courier (DASH, FedEx, UPS), specimens must be packaged to meet UN3373 Category B packaging requirements. Specimen collection and shipping supplies may be ordered from the NCSLPH Online Supply Ordering System. Specimens can also be sent to NCSLPH using the NC DOA Medical Courier.

Please contact NCSLPH Customer Service with any questions 919-733-3937.

Commercial Testing
Influenza A/H5 testing is also being offered at some commercial laboratories. Providers should contact individual commercial laboratories for more information or with questions such as specimen collection and handling requirements. Turnaround times vary for these commercial laboratories.

- Associated Regional and University Pathologists (ARUP) Laboratories
    - https://ltd.aruplab.com/Tests/Pub/3018970
- Labcorp
    - 140046: Influenza A and Influenza B With Reflex to H5 Subtyping, NAA | Labcorp
- MAKO Medical Laboratories
    - https://makodirectory.com/test/424445
- Quest Diagnostics
    - https://testdirectory.questdiagnostics.com/test/test-detail/13998/influenza-a-h5-virus-rna-qualitative-real-time-pcr-respiratory?cc=MASTER