

Testing for Influenza Viruses by the Public Health Laboratories

Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Laboratory and Texas Laboratory Response Network (LRN)

The role of the public health laboratories in influenza testing is primarily surveillance to monitor the distribution and spread of the virus, the detection of new variants of the virus, and to assist in outbreak investigations. It is not for managing disease in individual patients; however, the laboratory can provide reference and diagnostic testing in emergency situations.

Influenza-like illness is fever (>100° F) with cough and/or sore throat.

Based on this role, effective May 26, 2009, the laboratories will accept only the following specimens for influenza testing:

1. Hospitalized patients with influenza-like illness - prior influenza A rapid antigen testing is recommended but not required.
2. Outpatients with influenza-like illness who are part of a critical public health investigation, regardless of rapid influenza A test results - as identified by the DSHS Health Service Region (HSR) or DSHS Infectious Disease Control Unit (IDCU) and communicated by the HSR or IDCU to the state laboratory. Prior influenza A rapid antigen testing is recommended but not required.
3. Outpatients in established surveillance systems - specimens from providers who are participants in the DSHS ILINet (previously known as Sentinel Provider Surveillance System) or viral culture/PCR surveillance system as designated by the DSHS Infectious Disease Control Unit (IDCU) or DSHS Health Service Region and communicated by the IDCU or HSR to the state laboratory; prior influenza A rapid antigen testing is recommended but not required.
4. Emergency situations - as identified by the HSR or IDCU and communicated to the state laboratory.
5. Patients who have died with influenza-like illness and have no other known cause of death (antemortem specimens).

DSHS may modify this list depending on the specific epidemiological and clinical characteristics of the influenza virus.

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