



DATE: July 2, 2025

TO: Healthcare Providers, Healthcare Facilities, Clinical Laboratories, and Local Health Departments

FROM: New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Wadsworth Center and Division of Epidemiology, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC)

Health Advisory: Influenza Testing among Persons with Respiratory Illness During Periods of Low Influenza Virus Circulation

Please distribute immediately to: Clinical Laboratories, Hospitals, Local Health Departments, Physicians, Physician Assistants, Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Facility Staff in The Departments of Emergency Medicine, Infectious Disease, Epidemiology/Infection Prevention, Laboratory Medicine, Medical Directors, Directors of Nursing, and all patient care areas

The purpose of this advisory is to provide guidance on the surveillance and detection of novel influenza A viruses, including highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N1), in patients hospitalized with severe respiratory illness or seeking outpatient care for respiratory illness during periods of low influenza virus circulation, and instructions for the submission of specimens to Wadsworth Center Virology Laboratory.

Summary

- In response to the ongoing global outbreak of HPAI A(H5N1), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)¹ is encouraging year-round testing for influenza among persons with respiratory illness in hospital and outpatient settings.
- The New York State Department of Health (the Department) recommends subtyping of all positive detections of influenza A virus.
- When collecting histories from patients with respiratory symptoms, clinicians are encouraged to screen patients regarding their exposures to poultry, wild birds, dairy cattle, swine, domesticated cats, raw animal products, and agricultural fairs.
- The Department and the CDC request that respiratory samples from persons hospitalized with laboratory confirmed influenza A, particularly patients receiving intensive care unit (ICU) level care, be promptly forwarded to the Wadsworth Center Virology Laboratory for additional testing, including subtyping, whole genome sequencing, and antiviral resistance testing.
- Additionally, in the outpatient setting for persons with laboratory confirmed influenza A reporting high risk exposures², the Department requests that respiratory samples be forwarded promptly to the Wadsworth Center Virology Laboratory for additional testing, including subtyping, whole genome sequencing, and antiviral resistance testing.
- Laboratories, hospitals, and outpatient clinical providers should recognize that adherence to recommendations for influenza testing, including routine subtyping, and sample submission are important steps for detection of human infections with novel influenza A viruses including HPAI A(H5N1), especially during the summer when influenza testing may not be routine.
- **If you suspect a patient has a novel influenza A virus infection based on an influenza A positive laboratory result in combination with clinical history and exposures, immediately**

¹ [CDC Guidelines for Summer 2025 Influenza Surveillance](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/surveillance/)

² <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/prevention/hpai-interim-recommendations.html>

contact the New York State Department of Health at 518-473-4439 or 1-866-881-2809 after hours and the local health department (LHD)³ where the patient resides. For cases residing in New York City, please call provider access line at 1-866-692-3641.

Background

Public health agencies continue to monitor and respond to the global outbreak of HPAI A(H5N1). Millions of poultry have been affected in 51 states or territories in the current U.S. outbreak, the largest domestic outbreak of avian influenza in poultry in recorded history. Additionally, HPAI A(H5N1) has been detected in U.S. dairy cattle herds in 17 states, domesticated cats⁴, and sporadically in other animals⁵ and wild birds in 51 states.

The strain of HPAI A(H5N1) currently circulating in the U.S. poses a low risk to the public, and there is no known person-to-person transmission. However, 70 human cases of A(H5N1) infection associated with the outbreak in U.S. dairy cows⁶ and poultry⁷ have been reported, including one death. While the number of human cases nationally remains small, influenza viruses are known to be unpredictable and highly mutable with the potential for a rapid change in tropism and transmission, which is a concern given the extent of spread in birds and novel detections in dairy cows and other animals.

Please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html> for the most up-to-date information.

Recommended actions:

- 1. Conduct enhanced influenza surveillance during months when seasonal influenza incidence is typically low.**
 - i. Continue ordering influenza testing and subtyping on patients with respiratory illness consistent with influenza (with or without fever or conjunctivitis).
 - ii. The Department recommends increased levels of clinical suspicion for influenza in patients with respiratory illness who are at higher risk for contracting avian or novel influenza, such as those with reported history of high-risk exposure.
 - iii. If you have a patient with respiratory illness who is at high risk for contracting avian or novel influenza, contact the local health department (LHD)⁸ where the patient resides for testing guidance. If unable to reach the LHD where the patient resides, contact the New York State Department of Health Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4439 during business hours or at 866-881-2809 after hours. For persons residing in New York City, please call the NYSDOHMH provider access line at 1-866-692-3641.
- 2. Submit to Wadsworth Center all positive influenza A respiratory samples for the following patients for subtyping, sequencing, and other specialized analyses:**
 - i. All hospitalized patients requiring ICU care
 - ii. Persons from outpatient settings reporting high-risk exposures without known influenza subtype
- 3. As capacity allows, hospital laboratories are encouraged to submit to Wadsworth Center all positive influenza A specimens without known subtype in hospitalized persons NOT requiring ICU care, for subtyping, sequencing, and other specialized analyses.**

Specimen and shipping instructions

- i. Specimens acceptable for influenza testing at Wadsworth Center include nasopharyngeal swabs (NPs), oropharyngeal swabs (OPs), and nasal swabs (NSs) in viral transport media (VTM) or universal transport media (UTM).

³ https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/74/wr/mm7405a2.htm>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p-0703-4th-human-case-h5.html>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p-0715-confirm-h5.html>

⁸ https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/

- ii. Flocked swabs are preferred. Sterile Dacron® or rayon swabs with plastic or metal handles may also be used. Do NOT use cotton or calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden sticks. Place the swab in liquid VTM or UTM. The swabs and media used for routine SARS-CoV-2 or influenza (polymerase chain reaction (PCR)) testing can be used. **Do NOT use saline or dry swabs.**
- iii. **Specimens MUST be kept cool until they reach Wadsworth Laboratory.** Refrigerate OR store specimens in cooler with frozen gel packs until ready to ship. **Specimens should be shipped overnight on frozen gel packs.**
- iv. Specifics regarding influenza specimen collection and shipping to Wadsworth Center can be found at: <https://www.wadsworth.org/programs/id/virology/services/specimen-collection>
- v. A shipping manifest from an electronically submitted Remote Order OR an [Infectious Disease Requisition](#) (IDR)⁹ form requesting influenza testing with subtyping should accompany all specimens sent to Wadsworth.
- vi. **For questions about shipping on holidays or weekends, please call 518-474-4177.**
- vii. Please ship specimens to:
**David Axelrod Institute
Virology Laboratory
Wadsworth Center
New York State Dept. of Health
120 New Scotland Ave.
Albany, NY 12208**

Infection Prevention Considerations

Standard, contact, and airborne precautions, including the use of eye protection are recommended for patients presenting for medical care or evaluation who have illness consistent with influenza and recent exposure to birds or other animals potentially infected with HPAI A(H5N1) virus.

- Patients with suspected HPAI A(H5N1) infection who present to a healthcare facility should be placed in an airborne infection isolation room (AIIR).
- If a patient presents to a healthcare facility where an AIIR is not available, the patient should be instructed to wear a facemask and should be placed in an examination room with the door closed until discharge or transfer to a facility with an AIIR. The patient should not be placed in any room where room exhaust is recirculated without high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration.
- Additional infection prevention and control guidance for healthcare facilities with or without an AIIR, including additional patient placement information and cleaning and disinfection steps, is available¹⁰.

The Department appreciates your continued support to prevent and control influenza, as well as the partnership with laboratories, hospitals, and providers to identify and contain potential human cases of novel influenza in New York State.

Resources and Questions

- Questions regarding submission of specimens to Wadsworth Center can be directed to wcid@health.ny.gov.
- Questions pertaining to enrollment to Wadsworth Center CLIMS for access to remote ordering and access to electronic test reports can be directed to climsoutreach@health.ny.gov.
- General questions about suspected A(H5N1) cases can be directed to the New York State Department of Health BCDC at 1-866-881-2809 evenings, weekends, and holidays or by email at BCDC@health.ny.gov.
- NYC based clinicians should contact the healthcare provider access line at 1-866-692-3641
- General questions about influenza infection control in hospitals, nursing homes, and diagnostic and treatment centers can be sent to icp@health.ny.gov

⁹ <https://www.wadsworth.org/programs/id/idr>

¹⁰ https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/hcp/novel-flu-infection-control/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/novel-flu-infection-control.htm

- Additional New York State Department of Health guidance for clinicians regarding avian influenza is available at: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/avian/providers.htm>
- General New York State Department of Health avian influenza information is available at: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/avian/>