



MARK B HORTON, MD, MSPH
Director

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor

California Sentinel Provider Influenza Surveillance Program Frequently Asked Questions

My schedule is very busy. Why should I take the time to be an influenza sentinel provider?

The surveillance data you provide are critical for protecting the public's health. Influenza viruses are constantly evolving and cause substantial morbidity and mortality in California every year. Data reported by sentinel providers are critical for monitoring the impact of influenza and to guide prevention and control activities and vaccine strain selection.

What are my primary responsibilities as a sentinel provider? May I participate in the Sentinel Provider Influenza Surveillance System by only sending diagnostic specimens to the state Viral and Rickettsial Diseases Laboratory (VRDL)?

The Sentinel Provider Influenza Surveillance Network is first and foremost a system for tracking the weekly proportion of Influenza-Like-Illness (ILI) cases in your practice. Therefore, we request that at a minimum, sentinel providers log reports of ILI. Providing specimens is also very important and valuable since specimens tell us which flu strains are circulating.

How do I report my ILI data over the internet?

Go to: <http://www2a.cdc.gov/ilinet>

Enter your user ID and password.

Click "Enter Data."

Select the date code based on the last day of the week for which you are reporting.

Enter ILI data based on age group of patients seen for the week.

Enter the total number of patients seen for the week.

Click "No" if you have not already entered data for the week (sometimes people go back and make corrections, in that case you would click "Yes").

Click "Submit" and your data will be sent to CDC.

We do not use the Internet; can our practice still participate?

Yes. The last page of the CDC work folder contains instructions on how to fax your reports.

Simply copy the last page and use it as a template. Fill in the counts, and fax the sheet to the toll-free number 1-888-232-1322.

Which specimens should be sent to VRDL?

Because of anticipated high demand and limited laboratory resources this season, VRDL will be unable to test all specimens submitted. We have revised the protocol for specimen submission to request no more than 2-3 surveillance specimens collected Monday and Tuesday and sent in one box on Wednesday. Testing 2-3 specimens a week from each sentinel provider helps us meet our goal of testing a sampling of specimens from different areas of the state in different age groups throughout the influenza season. This will allow us to characterize circulating influenza viruses, and understand which populations are being affected, and which viruses may be good candidates for inclusion in the 2010-11 vaccine.

I can't find my CDC work folder which had my password; what should I do?

Please contact our program coordinator, Maria Nevarez (510) 620-5848 maria.nevarez@cdph.ca.gov and request a replacement work folder, or your ID and password if that is all you need.

Which weeks mark the beginning and end of the ILI reporting for the season?

The period for reporting ILI data for the 2009-2010 season begins October 4, 2009 and year-round surveillance continues until October 2, 2010. Please begin collecting your data during week 40 (October 4-10, 2009) and continue reporting throughout the year. We would like you to report year-round, especially now that influenza activity has increased early in the season due to circulation of 2009 H1N1 flu virus.

Do I need to report for a week in which I did not see any patients with ILI?

Yes. Please remember to report your ILI data each week, even if no patients with influenza-like illness are seen. Zero reporting is important for complete and accurate records and for calculating the proportion of patients you see each week for ILI. It is important to know both when you are seeing ILI activity and when you are not.

To which practices do you provide the Rapid Flu Test Kits?

We provide influenza rapid test kits to practices that express a desire for them and that are not served by their own labs. A practice that performs rapid flu tests must have a CLIA waiver.

What kind of Rapid Test Kits will be provided to Sentinel Providers?

This year Sentinel Providers may receive one of three types of kits; QuickVue flu/non-flu test kits (blue box), QuickVue A/B kits (purple box) or BinaxNow Influenza A & B.

We don't see a reason to use the Rapid Flu Test Kits you have offered; the results will not change our management of patients.

The Rapid Flu Test Kits are optional. We ask that you not request them if you do not wish to use them because they are expensive and our budget can supply only a limited number for our providers.

Do you want us to exclude our immunocompromised patients from the case count?

No. There are no exclusion criteria for patients with ILI. There are also no exclusion criteria for the total number of patients you see during a week. Simply report the number of ILI cases by the four age categories, as well as the total of number of patients seen that week.

Can an RN who is not a Nurse Practitioner be a sentinel provider?

No. CDC stipulates that sentinel providers must be physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners. (Exceptions for school nurses and school based health centers have been approved.)

How and when can we get results from the specimens we sent to VRDL?

Your results will come to you by mail from VRDL. The results will arrive approximately 10 days after your specimen submittal.

Can we get replacement specimen kits?

Yes. We provide each practice with three kits. Each time you send VRDL a kit with specimens, we will send you a replacement kit. If you find you do not have enough kits, please e-mail flu@cdph.ca.gov or contact Katharine King at (510) 307-8585.

Can we get replacement rapid test kits?

Yes, depending on our resources. We usually do not send out more than one box of rapid test kits per practice (each box contains several rapid tests). If you are a large practice and need more, we will consider your request depending on how many kits we have left for the season.

Who should we call if we have questions about the program?

If you have questions, please contact Maria Nevarez (510) 620-5848 or maria.nevarez@cdph.ca.gov.

Some of my colleagues wish to participate in the network; can they sign up?

Yes. We are always looking for good reporters for our network, especially in certain counties, such as Los Angeles and San Bernardino and rural counties, where we have a critical lack of providers. Please ask your colleagues to contact us at the emails/phone numbers given above, or send us your colleagues' names and contact information, and we will get in touch with them. You can also refer interested providers to our website for additional information.

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/vrdl/Pages/CaliforniaSentinelProviderProgram.aspx> .