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GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor

Sentinel Provider Guidelines for Submitting Specimens for Influenza Testing, 2023–2024 Season

Criteria for Submitting Specimens:

Patients with influenza-like illness (temperature $\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$ or 37.8°C , AND cough and/or sore throat), especially those:

- presenting at the beginning, peak, or end of the influenza season
- with either: severe disease, recent overseas travel, recent swine exposure, occurring in an outbreak setting, or those who have received this season's influenza vaccine

Collecting Specimens from Patients with Suspected Influenza:

- **Please use the sterile swabs provided.** Collect one nasal swab and one throat swab from each patient and place both swabs into one tube of viral transport medium (VTM). Break off sticks so the cap can be placed on the VTM tube. **Screw cap on tightly.** Afterward, the tube **MUST BE REFRIGERATED at 4°C!**
- Label each tube with the following: **patient's name, physician's name, date collected, and type of specimen**
- Complete the online [VRDL General Purpose Submittal Form](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/VRDL_Specimen_Submittal_Forms.aspx) (**ONE** form **per tube**) and print out. This form can be found at this link:
www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/VRDL_Specimen_Submittal_Forms.aspx
- **For shipping:** Set the VTM tube with swabs in the plastic biohazard bag (STP-701) and the secondary envelope (STP-700) provided. Then place it in the plastic zip-lock bag with the specimen form and put it in the Styrofoam icebox with the two frozen ice packs.
- Call Golden State Overnight (now GLS) courier at **1-800-322-5555** for specimen pick-up (“remote pickup”). Use account # **35297**; the VRDL shipping address is located on the air bill with the kit.
- Specimens can be stored at 4°C for up to 3 days. Please do not collect specimens if the hold time will exceed 3 days. Specimens can be shipped Monday through Thursday.
- Do NOT ship specimens on Fridays; for specimens collected late on Thursday or Friday, please store at 4°C and arrange for pick up on Monday (or Tuesday if over a holiday weekend). **However, please do not collect specimens if the hold time will exceed 3 days.**
- Freezing may decrease viability of the specimen and is not recommended unless stored at -70°C .
- Please batch samples for shipment on Wednesday or Thursday in one box. For example, store any samples collected Monday through Wednesday in the refrigerator, then ship all in one box on either Wednesday or Thursday to the VRDL.

Note: VTM can be stored at room temperature PRIOR to use for collecting samples. Please place cold packs in the freezer until ready to use. Replacement kits will be sent to you for each shipment we receive from you. Each provider should always have at least 1 kit and 2-3 VTM vials on hand. Please do not discard boxes at the end of the season as they are to be reused each season.

If you have any questions concerning submission of specimens or are running low on supplies (boxes/non-expired VTM), please contact Alice Chen (Alice.Chen@cdph.ca.gov) or the VRDL at 510-307-8585.