

# MLS Laboratory Update: Specimen Submissions for Summer 2025 Influenza Surveillance

JUNE 03, 2025

## Purpose of this Message:

To notify MLS clinical laboratory partners of updated specimen submission guidance for summer 2025 influenza surveillance (weeks 21-39, or 5/18 – 9/28/2025) to ensure enhanced monitoring for novel influenza A viruses, including avian influenza A(H5N1).

## Action Items:

To ensure timely identification of novel influenza strains, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) requests submission of influenza-positive specimens from both **hospitalized and outpatient** patients as outlined below:

- Please submit specimens for **all HOSPITALIZED patients** or **deceased individuals** with influenza-like illness (ILI)\* or clinical suspicion of influenza under **Project 1492** that are:
  - PCR or rapid antigen positive for influenza A or B, or
  - Influenza A specimens that are:
    - Unsubtyped
    - Subtyped as seasonal H1
    - Indeterminate subtype
  - During summer 2025, positive influenza A specimens from hospitalized patients that are subtyped as H1N1pdm09 or H3 may also be submitted to MDH-PHL.
- Please submit up to five (5) specimens per week from **OUTPATIENTS** with respiratory ILI and/or conjunctivitis or clinical suspicion of influenza A under **Project 493** that are:
  - PCR or rapid antigen positive for influenza A (*influenza B is not requested*) or
  - Influenza A specimens that are:
    - Unsubtyped
    - Subtyped as seasonal H1
    - Indeterminate subtype

\* ILI is defined as fever > 100°F, and cough or sore throat and no other known cause other than influenza.

## Testing & Subtyping Recommendations

- Please continue to perform influenza testing for **both hospitalized and outpatient individuals** with respiratory illness, with or without a fever or conjunctivitis, throughout the summer, particularly for persons with recent exposures to poultry, dairy cattle, raw milk, wild birds, swine, and/or agricultural events.
  - Perform influenza A subtyping using in-house subtyping or a commercial clinical laboratory - ideally within 24 hours of specimen collection.
  - If subtyping cannot be performed, submit positive influenza A specimens to MDH-PHL within 24 hours of receiving the result: [Specimen Collection and Testing for Seasonal Influenza \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/hcp/lab.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/hcp/lab.html).
  - Immediately report suspected or positive avian influenza A(H5N1) cases or H5 subtyped results, to MDH (651-201-5414 or 1-877-676-5414) while patients are still present in clinic to ensure proper specimen collection and submission.

## Additional Specimen Submission criteria to MDH-PHL:

- NON-HOSPITALIZED LABORATORY surveillance – Project 493 include:
  - Specimen requests for outbreak or cluster investigation by MDH Epidemiologists.
  - Any unusual circumstances for which MDH has specifically requested specimen(s) submission to MDH-PHL.
- NOVEL AVIAN INFLUENZA A(H5N1) Testing
  - If avian influenza A(H5N1) is suspected contact MDH for guidance (651-201-5414 or 1-877-676-5414) on suspect avian influenza A(H5N1) specimen submissions. Further guidance can be found at [Information for Health Professionals on Novel Influenza A Viruses \(including HPAI H5N1\) - MN Dept. of Health](#).
  - Submit suspect avian influenza A(H5N1) specimens from hospitalized and outpatient individuals with respiratory illness, with or without a fever or conjunctivitis.
  - If your laboratory performs onsite influenza testing using a rapid test or by RT-PCR:
    - Submit only influenza A positive specimens for suspect avian influenza A(H5N1) testing.
    - Submit positive influenza A specimens that are unsubtyped, subtyped as “seasonal H1,” or “indeterminate subtype” to MDH-PHL for further characterization, as they may be avian influenza A(H5N1) or other variant influenza strains.

- DO NOT submit positive influenza A specimens that are subtyped as H1N1pdm09 or H3 to MDH-PHL for suspect avian influenza A(H5N1) testing.
  - For patients with conjunctivitis, with or without respiratory illness, please submit both a nasopharyngeal swab and a conjunctival swab specimen.
- SENTINEL surveillance – These facilities are pre-determined and have a specific protocol. Specimen submission guidelines for these programs have not changed. If you have any questions regarding specimen submission guidelines for your program, please check with your MDH contact.

## Background:

Since 2022, highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N1) has affected poultry, dairy cattle, wild birds, and mammals across the U.S., including Minnesota. MDH continues to work closely with the Minnesota Board of Animal Health and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to monitor and mitigate transmission risks.

- Risk to the general public remains low, primarily limited to those in direct contact with infected animals, their environments, or animal products, including unpasteurized dairy products, such as raw milk.
- FDA testing has shown pasteurization inactivates influenza A (H5N1) virus, making commercial milk safe.

## General Notes:

- Ensure submitted specimen remnants meet MDH submission criteria within the [Infectious Disease Laboratory Test Catalog](https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/) (<https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/>)
- Recollection is not required if remnants do not meet criteria.
- MDH-PHL offers secure electronic ordering and results reporting through a submission portal. If interested, please contact Ginny Dobbins, Health Informatics Supervisor, 651-201-4546, [Ginny.Dobbins@state.mn.us](mailto:Ginny.Dobbins@state.mn.us) or [health.idl.informatics@state.mn.us](mailto:health.idl.informatics@state.mn.us).

## Additional Information:

### Weekly Influenza Activity Webpage:

Thank you to the laboratories that are providing weekly influenza data. MDH is again publishing these data as part of an off-season respiratory disease report. Results of the data gathered from various MDH influenza surveillance programs can be found on the [MDH Weekly Influenza & Respiratory Activity webpage](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/stats/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/stats/index.html>).

- [MDH: Influenza \(www.mdhflu.com\)](http://www.mdhflu.com)
- [MDH: Novel Influenza A \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/current/novel.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/current/novel.html)
- [CDC: H5N1 Bird Flu: Current Situation Summary \(https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm)
- [CDC: Information for Clinicians on Influenza Virus Testing \(https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis/index.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis/index.htm)
- [Board of Animal Health: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response \(https://www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai\)](https://www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai)
- [USDA: Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections\)](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections)
- [FDA: Updates on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) \(https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/updates-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai\)](https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/updates-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai)
- [MDH: Infectious Disease Lab Forms \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/forms.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/forms.html)

## Questions:

For questions on laboratory testing please contact:

- Sarah Namugenyi, Interim Virology Unit Supervisor  
651-201-5691, [Sarah.Namugenyi@state.mn.us](mailto:Sarah.Namugenyi@state.mn.us)
- Anna Strain, Infectious Disease Laboratory Manager  
651-201-5035, [Anna.Strain@state.mn.us](mailto:Anna.Strain@state.mn.us),

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Minnesota Laboratory System  
Minnesota Department of Health, Public Health Laboratory  
601 Robert St. N, St. Paul, MN 55164-0899  
651-201-5200  
[health.mnlabsystem@state.mn.us](mailto:health.mnlabsystem@state.mn.us)  
[www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mls/index.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mls/index.html)

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