



**DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

DELAWARE PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Health Care Providers
From: Christina Pleasanton, Acting Laboratory Director
Subject: Influenza Testing
Date: September 1, 2011

During the upcoming influenza season, the Delaware Public Health Laboratory (DPHL) will again be offering a Real-Time Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (rRT-PCR) method for detection and characterization of influenza virus. This service is available to health care providers in Delaware at no charge.

The data generated by rRT-PCR will help determine what influenza viral types are circulating in Delaware, and the most appropriate vaccine formulation for future production. Results will be available within 48 to 72 hours depending on the number of specimens received. rRT-PCR has the ability to detect non-viable viral RNA and provides optimal sensitivity and specificity for the identification of influenza. Furthermore, DPHL will be able to use PCR to distinguish the common human strains of influenza virus (H1, H3) from uncommon strains (H5 and H7) and from the Influenza 2009 A/H1N1 pandemic strain.

Given the abundance of circulating seasonal A/H3, 2009 A/H1N1, and influenza B during last year's influenza season, DPHL plans to slightly decrease this year's surveillance. We are asking our health care providers to limit their specimen submissions to no more than five specimens per day. Moreover, we are asking that our health care providers choose those specimens to provide an overall representation of their patient population.

We encourage health care providers who submit influenza specimens to DPHL to be on the laboratory's information management system (LIMS). This system will provide real time electronic access to test results. State clinics are already on LIMS, but hospitals and sentinel physicians may not be. To gain access to LIMS you will need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding and receive 1-2 hours of training. To initiate the process, please call Kathy Gray, DPHL LIMS Administrator, at 302-223-1520.

Laboratory couriers will pick up specimens daily from our regular pick-up locations. For pick-up sites see the DPHL web site <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/lab/courierroutes.html>. The Laboratory may also make special arrangements for specimen pick-up for those practices

that agree to be sentinel physician sites for influenza surveillance. An added benefit for sentinel sites is that the mechanism for receipt of specimen collection materials and pick up and delivery to the DPHL will already be in place should a new strain of influenza appear and only state public health laboratories have the ability to test for it as happened with the 2009 A/H1N1 pandemic. If you would like to become a sentinel site, please contact the Epidemiology Bureau at 302-744-1033 to begin the process.

To receive a supply of collection kits, please contact the laboratory kit room at 302-223-1520 or e-mail labsupplies@state.de.us. Use the **influenza** virus collection kit, which is necessary for the collection and transport of specimens for identification of influenza types A and B. Instructions are included in the kit. If rapid testing has been performed, please provide the results on the requisition form.

The DPHL will be participating in a pilot program conducted by CDC, to perform pyrosequencing for antiviral resistance on a subset of isolates. Results will not be routinely reported. Certain resistant strains that are identified are subject to further epidemiological investigation.

For more information regarding influenza see the DPHL web site:
<http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/lab/flu.html>.

Thank you for your participation in the Division of Public Health's Influenza Surveillance Program.