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GOVERNOR

## CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

### DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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Subject: 2025-2026 Influenza Surveillance

Dear colleague,

Kentucky's influenza season is quickly approaching, and increased reporting will be required as the season progresses. Influenza testing, surveillance and reporting are important for monitoring trends of disease and informing public health recommendations. **Once again, the Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) is requesting submission of a subset of respiratory specimens that have tested positive for influenza. Please be sure to submit the specimens in viral transport media to the KDPH Division of Laboratory Services (DLS).**

To generate a comprehensive picture of the antigenic, genetic and antiviral properties of influenza viruses that are emerging and/or actively circulating in the U.S. and worldwide, it is required that DLS submit a specified number of virus surveillance specimens to the CDC. Therefore, it is imperative that virus specimens be submitted to DLS to identify optimal vaccine candidates in the upcoming influenza season.

Rapid Influenza Diagnostic (RIDT) and PCR testing may be used to aid in diagnostic and treatment decisions for patients in clinical settings, such as determining whether to prescribe antiviral medications. **The following criteria should be used to determine which specimens to submit DLS for influenza testing by RT-PCR:**

- **Up to 5 influenza virus positive specimens per week, a mix of influenza A and B if available, regardless of test method performed** (in addition to the specimens meeting the below criteria).
- Specimens that are negative by RIDT when community influenza activity is high and laboratory confirmation of influenza is desired.
- Specimens that are positive by RIDT and the community prevalence of influenza is low, and a false positive result is a consideration.
- Specimens from a patient who had recent close exposure to pigs, poultry, or dairy cattle or other animals, and novel influenza A virus infection is possible (e.g., influenza viruses circulate widely among swine and birds, including poultry, and can infect other animals such as horses and dogs).
- **Hospitalized patients** with suspected influenza. Influenza testing is recommended for hospitalized patients; however, empiric antiviral treatment should be initiated as soon as possible without the need to wait for any influenza testing results.

Also, please remind facilities about the importance of continued surveillance and [reporting](#) of certain types of influenza events:

- Report influenza-associated deaths occurring in children < 18 years of age or individuals who are pregnant or recently postpartum (within three months of delivery) to your local health department or KDPH within one day.
- Report outbreaks of two or more cases of the same respiratory illness (e.g., COVID-19, influenza, RSV) occurring within 72 hours among patients and/or staff in healthcare settings to your local health department.
- Performing laboratories should report laboratory-confirmed influenza to KDPH through electronic laboratory reporting (ELR) within five business days, including influenza detected by:
  - Reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT PCR)
  - Nucleic acid detection; or
  - Viral culture

Flu specimen collection supplies and mailers are available from DLS free of charge. Specimens can be shipped via the DLS-funded courier (**preferred** – also used for pickup of Newborn Screening specimens), or by FedEx overnight delivery. DLS has begun transitioning to a new ordering portal for supplies through the Kentucky Online Gateway (KOG) and submitting facilities with KOG access should place supply orders through the KOG. For those without access, the requisition form for ordering lab kits can be accessed via this web link: <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/dls/Pages/default.aspx>. Collection, packaging and shipping guidelines are also available on the DLS website.

For additional questions regarding flu test kit requests and shipping options, contact Leigh Ann Bates ([LeighAnn.Bates@ky.gov](mailto:LeighAnn.Bates@ky.gov); 502-782-7703 or 502-564-4446). For additional guidance on specimen collection, handling and testing, please contact Teresa Fields ([Teresa.Fields@ky.gov](mailto:Teresa.Fields@ky.gov); 502-782-7718 or 502-564-4446).

Your contribution to this important public health effort is appreciated. For more information about respiratory viruses in Kentucky please visit: [www.coveryourcough.ky.gov](http://www.coveryourcough.ky.gov). If you have any questions regarding influenza surveillance, please contact Carrie Tuggle ([Carrie.Tuggle@ky.gov](mailto:Carrie.Tuggle@ky.gov); 502-352-5800).

Thank you for your partnership,



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