

Pandemic 2009 Influenza A H1N1 (a.k.a. swine flu) Sample Guidelines for Alaska Revised 9/24/2009

Throat swabs, nasal or naso-pharyngeal swabs, or nasal aspirates are approved specimen sources for PCR testing. Use the flocked swab(s) included in the UTM kit, and place the swab into Universal Transport Media (UTM). **Nasal washings are not an FDA approved specimen source** for the pandemic 2009 influenza PCR assay released by the CDC. Nasal wash specimens will be placed into viral culture. If influenza A is isolated from a nasal wash specimen, that isolate is an acceptable specimen source, and can be tested with the pandemic influenza PCR assay.

Both public health laboratories can supply UTM, however, any commercial viral transport media may be used, as long as it has not expired by the date of collection. Please be sure that it is designed to be used for viruses. Flocked swabs are preferred for specimen collection, but any swab may be used as long as it is **not cotton, and not on a wooden stick**. Flocked swabs, universal transport media, or viral transport media can be purchased directly from numerous suppliers, including Fisher Scientific, Diagnostic Hybrids, Becton Dickinson, and VWR.

Please use the revised Fairbanks Request Form. <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/labs/publications/default.htm> Please indicate the specimen source, and check the influenza box in the Molecular Detection section of the request form. Label the specimen container. Unlabeled specimens can't be processed. Collected specimens must be maintained at 4 degrees Centigrade. Ship as diagnostic specimens. [Chill in transit with cool packs](#). Specimens that are received warm are unsatisfactory for influenza PCR testing.

CDC recommends that specimens be received within 3 days of specimen collection. **Specimens received more than 3 days after specimen collection will include a qualifier with the results.** ASVL will be conducting studies to determine the time stability of influenza RNA in specimens submitted in UTM. Depending upon the results of those studies, our recommendation may change in a subsequent revision to these guidelines.

If you are able to perform rapid testing for influenza, please perform a rapid test prior to submission, and indicate your results on the request form. Please use the following bullets to guide decisions regarding referral of specimens to the State Public Health Laboratory:

Specimens that should not be submitted to the ASVL

- Outpatient specimens which are positive by rapid influenza A testing.
- Specimens which are positive by rapid influenza B testing.
- Specimens from patients with typical or moderate influenza symptoms.

Specimens that should be submitted to the ASVL

- Specimens from hospitalized patients with influenza-like illness, regardless of rapid test results.
- Outpatient specimens from patients with severe influenza-like illness which are negative by rapid influenza A testing.

Specimens from patients with typical or moderate influenza symptoms should no longer be submitted to public health laboratories. ASVL's priority is to conduct public health monitoring for severe illness due to Pandemic 2009 Influenza A (H1N1). Health care providers wishing to submit specimens for routine outpatient influenza testing are encouraged to contact any of the CLIA-certified commercial clinical laboratories serving Alaska.

Terry Schmidt
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9/24/2009

Chilling Influenza Respiratory Specimens During Transit

This illustration shows a typical specimen tube with three 4" x 5" ice packs, inside an insulated shipping box (6" x 7" x 8" inner dimensions, 10" x 11" x 11.5" outer dimensions). Shipping respiratory specimens with three frozen ice packs should be sufficient to keep the specimens chilled during transit to the laboratory. A shipping box of this size will also accommodate three 6" x 6" ice packs.

