

Respiratory disease testing: concomitant influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 testing is available

As co-circulation of influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 continues to increase this fall/winter, healthcare facilities are reminded that symptoms of COVID-19, influenza, and RSV are similar and symptomatic patients can be tested for all three viruses. Review CDC's Information for clinicians on influenza virus testing at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis/index.htm?web=1&wdLOR=c357BCB52-B57D-44F2-862D-3390224B249A>. Please contact NE DHHS at 402-471-2927, dhhs.epi@nebraska.gov, or your local health department (LHD) at <https://dhhs.ne.gov/lhd> if you have questions or unusual situations.

DHHS is asking laboratories who utilize a molecular influenza test to send any specimens to NPHL with a cycle threshold (CT) of 25 or lower for confirmatory influenza surveillance testing. If you believe you might have a false positive or false negative influenza test result, NPHL is available to confirm results. These specimens will be tested on the CDC Influenza-PCR assay to determine what viruses are currently circulating in Nebraska. This tests for influenza A virus, influenza B virus, influenza A virus subtype H3 [seasonal], influenza A virus subtype 2009 [H1N1], influenza B Yamagata lineage or influenza B Victoria lineage (if positive B). In turn, specimens are sent to the CDC for antigenic characterization of the virus. This information helps determine if the current vaccine covers for circulating viruses and what viruses should be included in the upcoming season's influenza vaccine.

Instructions to order influenza testing at NPHL

Use NUIrt (NPHL's Internet-based, electronic lab information system) to complete an order for FLUPCR (http://www.nphl.org/testing_results.cfm?testlink=51). To access NUIrt, click here (<https://nulirt.nebraskamed.com/login>) using your existing NUIrt account. If you are a new user, follow the previous link to register and create a new account. Please complete all the requested data fields included with the Ask On Entry (AOE) questions. A properly completed requisition is required for order processing. For orders created electronically, submitters should print a completed batch list within the NUIrt system to accompany the specimen. For issues related to NUIrt access, contact the NUIrt support group via email nulirtsupport@nebraskamed.com or contact client service representatives at 402-559-2440; or toll free: 1-866-290-1406.

Specimen Collection Requirements (NPHL only): The optimal specimen is a flocked, synthetic nasopharyngeal swab placed in a single tube of viral or universal transport medium. See information about collecting, handling, and transport of influenza laboratory specimens here: https://www.nphl.org/influenza_prepinfo.cfm.

Influenza reporting: report pediatric deaths, novel viruses, and outbreaks

Pediatric influenza-associated deaths and variant/novel viruses ARE reportable (https://www.nebraska.gov/rules-and-regs/regsearch/Rules/Health_and_Human_Services_System/Title-173/Chapter-01.pdf). Outbreaks of influenza or other respiratory diseases (RSV, hMPV, adenovirus, etc.) ARE reportable in congregate settings such as long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, or group homes. Reporting should occur when there are two or more cases of influenza-like illness among residents within 72 hours with at least one of the ill residents having laboratory-confirmed influenza or another respiratory disease. Outbreaks of influenza and other respiratory diseases in schools/daycares are also reportable to public health (either NE DHHS or your LHD). Individual cases of influenza or other respiratory diseases are NOT reportable unless the case is tested and resulted by a laboratory who currently participates in automated electronic laboratory reporting.

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