

Department of Health & Human Services
Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory
Virology Section
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COLLECTION OF VIRAL SPECIMENS FOR INFLUENZA DIAGNOSIS

Patients with an influenza infection will present with a febrile (38 – 40°C/100.4 – 104°F) respiratory illness. A laboratory diagnosis of influenza is made by the isolation and identification of the influenza virus, the collection of which is described in the procedure below. For optimal results samples should be collected during the first two days of illness (24 - 48 hours after onset of symptoms).

Materials Supplied

The Virology laboratory will supply an influenza collection kit upon request. You will receive viral transport media, nasopharyngeal swabs, throat swabs, requisition slips, biohazard shipping bags, and a shipping label. The gel freezer pack should be frozen so that it will be ready to mail. **Keep the Styrofoam and outer cardboard boxes as the return mailers.**

Reverse Transcription –Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR)

The HETL offers a RT-PCR assay, which will provide influenza A and B results, generally within twenty-four hours from receipt. General viral culture will be performed on samples testing negative for Influenza by PCR only if requested by selecting the Viral Culture Reflex test on the requisition. If you want results as soon as they are available, please include a phone number and the name of a contact person to whom results should be reported. **IF IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE RESULTS IMMEDIATELY, CONSIDER HAND DELIVERING THE SPECIMEN TO THE MAINE HETL.**

Collection and Transport

1. Please collect a nasopharyngeal swab or nasal wash whenever possible. It is not necessary to collect a separate swab for viral isolation.
2. Viral transport media, nasopharyngeal swabs, and throat swabs are supplied in the kit. Use polyester or Dacron-tipped swabs ONLY. Place the swab in the liquid and break off the end of the swab ensuring that the screw cap is tightly closed. Please do not use *calcium alginate swabs* as prolonged contact with this material can inactivate some viruses. Also, do not use swabs with wooden shafts.
3. Store specimen at refrigerator temperature (2 - 8°C) until ready for shipping. Please send sample as soon as possible. If you wish the container returned for further use please include the note requesting it. The lab will return the container, the ice pack and another shipping label.
4. **Please keep specimens separate from the paperwork. Place requisitions in a sealed plastic bag to avoid contamination or getting wet from the ice pack.** Use the frozen gel pack to keep the specimen cool but not frozen. Secure the box with tape and place the postage paid address label on the box. It is estimated that the container will remain cold for up to 24 hours.

All samples shipped must comply with federal regulations for the transport of diagnostic material,49 CFR

As always, if you have any questions on collection or shipment, please call the Virology section at the number listed above. The Maine Centers for Disease Control/Epidemiology Program can be reached at 287-7273 for all other questions.