



Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory Guidelines for Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) Testing

Updated September 15, 2009

Latest Recommendations for H1N1 testing at Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory (per Sonoma County Health Alert 8/17/2009):

Priority testing of specimens continues at Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory. Specimens from patients outside the following categories will not be prioritized at Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory. Current recommendations from the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services, limit testing to specimens from persons with influenza-like illness* (ILI) who:

1. require hospitalization
2. are pregnant
3. are direct care health care providers
4. have died from influenza-like illness **or**
5. may be an index case in an institutional/outbreak setting

***Influenza-like illness (ILI):** fever $>37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ (100°F) and a cough and/or sore throat

IMPORTANT: Specimens submitted to the Public Health lab must be received with the proper, **fully completed** requisition form (currently called the “Novel Influenza a (H1N1) Specimen Submittal Form” version dated 5/20/09) issued by the California Department of Public Health Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory. The form is available from the Sonoma County Public Health Lab and online at: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/vrdl/Documents/SwineInfluenzaSurveillanceSpecimenSubmittalForm520.pdf>. Specimen submissions must include the demographic information requested at the bottom of the submittal form, indicating if the patient is pregnant, hospitalized, in the ICU, a Healthcare worker, etc. **Failure to complete submittal forms properly may delay processing of specimens and may result in specimens being rejected for testing.** For more information, please contact the Public Health lab at 565-4711.

Specimen Collection:

- Each specimen should be labeled with: **date of collection, specimen type, and patient name.**
- Specimens should be collected within the first 24-72 hours of onset of symptoms and no later than 5 days after onset.
- At a minimum, collect a nasopharyngeal swab (nasopharyngeal wash or nasopharyngeal aspirate are also acceptable). Oropharyngeal (throat) swabs are acceptable, but may not have as high yield. If oropharyngeal specimens are collected, they should be accompanied by a specimen from the nasopharynx. Place the swabs in a standard container with 2-3 ml of viral transport media (VTM).
- If the patient is hospitalized with pneumonia, specimens from the lower respiratory tract (e.g., tracheal aspirate, bronchoalveolar lavage) should also be obtained.
- Use synthetic-tipped swabs only (Dacron, Rayon, polyester, etc.). Cotton or calcium alginate swabs are **not** acceptable for PCR testing. Use swabs with metal or plastic shafts only.

Specimen Storage and Shipment:

The specimens should be kept refrigerated at 4°C and sent on cold packs if they can be received by the Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory within five days of the date collected. If samples cannot be received by the laboratory within five days, they should be frozen at -70°C or below and shipped on dry ice. Specimens should be shipped per usual protocol to Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory, 3313 Chanate Road, Santa Rosa, CA, 95404.

Nasopharyngeal Swab Specimen Collection Procedure:

1. Put on mask and gloves.
2. Have patient sit with head against a wall as patients have a tendency to pull away during this procedure.
3. Insert swab into one nostril **straight back** (not upwards) and continue along the floor of the nasal passage for several centimeters until reaching the nasopharynx (resistance will be met). The distance from the nose to the ear gives an estimate of the distance the swab should be inserted. Do not force swab, if obstruction is encountered before reaching the nasopharynx, remove swab and try the other side.
4. Rotate the swab gently for 5-10 seconds to loosen the epithelial cells.
5. Remove swab and immediately insert swab into tube of viral transport media. Break, bend or clip the swab shaft to fit the transport medium tube and reattach the cap securely.
6. Specimen should be stored and transported at refrigerator temperature and received by laboratory as soon as possible and <5 days from time of collection.

For a video of NP swab collection, please see:

<http://video.cdc.gov/asxgen/nip/isd/swabdemo.wmv>

