

MLS Laboratory Update: Summer 2026 Influenza Surveillance

June 15th, 2026

Purpose of this Message:

First, MDH wants to thank all of the clinical partners that supported influenza surveillance efforts during the respiratory season. We greatly appreciate the hard work you all do to make this a successful program.

Second, this message is to notify MLS clinical laboratory partners of specimen submission guidance for summer 2026 influenza surveillance to ensure enhanced monitoring continues for novel influenza A viruses, including avian influenza A(H5N1).

Action Items:

- Please submit **all influenza A positive** specimens **and indicate hospitalized or non-hospitalized**
- Please submit **hospitalized influenza B positive** specimens and indicate hospitalized.
- [Influenza Surveillance Submission Form](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhflusurveillance.pdf)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mdhflusurveillance.pdf>)

Background:

To ensure timely identification of novel influenza strains, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) requests submission of influenza A-positive specimens from both **hospitalized and non-hospitalized** patients. For influenza B-positive specimens, submission is requested only for patients who are hospitalized.

Since 2022, highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N1) has affected poultry, dairy cattle, wild birds, and mammals across the U.S., including Minnesota. MDH continues to work closely with the CDC, The Minnesota Board of Animal Health, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to monitor and mitigate transmission risks.

The risk to the public remains low and is primarily limited to those in direct contact with infected animals, their environments, or animal products, including unpasteurized dairy products, such as raw milk.

FDA testing has shown pasteurization inactivates influenza A (H5N1) virus, making commercial milk safe.

Testing Recommendations

Please continue to perform influenza testing for **both hospitalized** and **outpatient** individuals with respiratory illness, with or without a fever or conjunctivitis, throughout the summer, particularly for persons with recent exposures to dairy cattle, raw milk, wild birds, poultry, swine, and/or agricultural events.

- Immediately report suspected or positive avian influenza A(H5N1) cases or H5 subtyped results, to MDH (651-201-5414 or 1-877-676-5414) while patients are still present in clinic to ensure proper specimen collection and submission.
- [Specimen Collection and Testing for Seasonal Influenza](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/hcp/lab.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/hcp/lab.html>).
- SENTINEL surveillance: These facilities are pre-determined and have a specific protocol. Specimen submission guidelines for these programs have not changed. If you have any questions regarding specimen submission guidelines for your program, please check with your MDH contact.

General Notes:

Please ensure that all remnant specimens meet MDH submission criteria found within the Infectious Disease Laboratory Test Catalog (<https://labinventory.web.health.state.mn.us/#/>)

It is not necessary to perform recollection on patients when remnant specimens do not meet submission guidance.

MDH-PHL offers both electronic order entry and report delivery using a submission portal. The submission portal allows for secure, electronic delivery of test orders and results. If interested, please fill out this form: [MDH Infectious Disease Laboratory Electronic Test Ordering and Results \(ETOR\) Onboarding](#) or contact Ginny Dobbins, Health Informatics Supervisor, 651-201-4546, Ginny.Dobbins@state.mn.us or health.idl.informatics@state.mn.us.

Additional Information:

Weekly Influenza Activity Webpage:

Thank you to the laboratories that are providing weekly influenza data. Results of the data gathered from various MDH influenza surveillance programs can be found on the MDH Weekly Influenza Activity webpage (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/stats/index.html>).

- MDH: Influenza (www.mdhflu.com)
- MDH: Novel Influenza A (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/current/novel.html>)

- MDH Weekly Influenza & Respiratory Activity (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/stats/index.html>)
- CDC: H5N1 Bird Flu: Current Situation Summary ([A\(H5\) Bird Flu Surveillance and Human Monitoring | Bird Flu | CDC](#))
- CDC: Information for Clinicians on Influenza Virus Testing (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis/index.htm>)
- Board of Animal Health: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response (<https://www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai>)
- USDA: Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections>)
- FDA: Updates on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) (<https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/updates-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai>)

Questions:

For questions on viral laboratory testing please contact:

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****PLEASE FORWARD THIS TO ALL APPROPRIATE PERSONNEL WITHIN YOUR INSTITUTION AND HEALTH SYSTEM****

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www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/idlab/mls/index.html

To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5200.

