



COMMON CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORIES RESPIRATORY VIRUS SEASON 2020-2021

December 2020

PEDIATRIC RESPIRATORY TESTING

Challenge:

During the COVID-19 pandemic care seeking behavior for pediatric patients may have changed, resulting in fewer office visits. Clinicians may be hesitant to test pediatrics for respiratory illness due to unclear guidance and shortages of specimen collection supplies and PPE. Pediatric populations may be directed to urgent care facilities or drive-up COVID-19 testing sites, which are often not enrolled as influenza-like illness (ILI) sites. These factors, as well as others, may contribute to fewer influenza specimens from pediatric populations submitted for surveillance.

Proposed Solutions:

- Provide dual collection kits and PPE for pediatric ILI sites, when feasible.
- Target urgent care facilities for ILI site enrollment.
- Work with influenza surveillance coordinators to understand how to best support potential ILI enrollment sites.
- Collaborate with pediatric clinics and children specialty hospitals to enroll as surveillance sites.

SUBMITTER ENROLLMENT FOR INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE

Challenge:

Current sentinel sites for influenza are not submitting as many samples to public health laboratories as is typical for the time of year. Clinical laboratory and commercial reference laboratories may be concerned about the burden for testing for influenza in addition to COVID-19 testing. There are many sites performing COVID-19 testing that are not connected to the sentinel surveillance network and they may not offer influenza testing.

Proposed Solutions:

- Target additional submitters for ILI enrollment, such as urgent care centers, small family practices, LTCF and other facilities that submitted COVID-19 samples over the summer.
- Provide submitters with shippers, mailers and specimen collection supplies to encourage regular submissions, instead of a sponsored FedEx account.
- Request all influenza positives (rapid or PCR) be submitted to public health laboratories until a certain threshold of influenza activity is met in your jurisdiction.
- Modify public health laboratory submitter forms to capture data fields meeting requirements for the CARES Act and influenza surveillance.
- Consider enrolling in web-based rapid test reporting sites (e.g., myvirena) to review daily rapid influenza test results. Reach out to sites reporting positives to obtain positive specimens.

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SINGLEPLEX VS. MULTIPLEX ASSAYS

Challenge:

Multiple tests are available for public health laboratories testing for influenza and SARS-CoV-2 including multiplex assays that detect SARS-CoV-2 viruses in addition to influenza A and B viruses. Public health laboratories are managing multiple workflows and testing algorithms to determine what specimens are tested with multiplex assays due to test availability (i.e., manufacturer allotment), ancillary supply chain constraints and fluctuating specimen submission volume.

Proposed Solution:

Consider a testing algorithm that includes both decision points for switching between the two.

SUPPRESSING RESULTS FROM MULTIPLEX ASSAYS OR REFLEX TESTING

Challenge:

There are multiple higher-throughput multiplex systems coming to market. If a laboratory runs a multiplex assay, regulatory concerns and laboratory information system complications may arise when only a single test is ordered.

Proposed Solutions:

- Adjust test order forms to include language that additional respiratory testing may be performed (this pre-notification meets CLIA requirements).
- Inform submitting sites that testing will include influenza A, influenza B and SC2 if testing for all.
- Suppress results reporting for the tests not explicitly ordered.
- Modify public health laboratory submitter forms to capture data fields meeting requirements for the CARES Act and influenza surveillance.

SUPPLY CHAIN CONSTRAINTS

Challenge:

There is ongoing concern regarding the availability of extraction reagents, transport media and pipette tips. Manufacturers have not provided clear information regarding their production plans and what items may be reliably supplied, making it difficult for public health laboratories to create strategic, robust and reliable testing plans.

Proposed Solutions:

- Perform bridging studies and/or verify multiple extraction platforms.
- Make and distribute [viral transport media \(VTM\)](#) and collection kits to submitters in your jurisdiction.
- Coordinate with state Emergency Operations Center officials for procurement of standard VTM or collection kits.
- Validate alternative transport medias (e.g., saline, PBS).



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