



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

*Department of General Services
Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services*

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Dear Colleague,

In response to the ongoing [outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza A\(H5N1\)](#) in wild birds, poultry, and dairy cattle, there is a critical need to sustain respiratory surveillance testing throughout the year. The Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) are [increasing influenza surveillance efforts](#), including this summer, in support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) national surveillance initiatives.

DCLS and VDH are **requesting that laboratories prospectively increase submissions of influenza A and B specimens to DCLS** for further molecular characterization and subtyping. The goal of this request is to maximize the chance of detecting human infections of influenza A (H5N1) during the summer months when influenza transmission is normally low. **More importantly, DCLS and VDH are interested in continuing these partnerships and maintaining this enhanced virologic surveillance of respiratory diseases, beyond the 2024 summer season.** Please consider implementing submission processes at your facility that would allow respiratory specimen submission to DCLS year-round. To see how public health laboratories are already supporting surveillance efforts, please visit [CDC's FluView webpage](#).

A reminder that influenza A positive specimens that are unsubtypeable must be promptly submitted to DCLS for further public health testing per [laboratory reporting requirements](#). Influenza A unsubtypeable specimens include the following for tests designed to provide subtyping results:

- (1) influenza A detection but no subtype generated
- (2) influenza A subtype identified as influenza A(H1) only and not influenza A(H1)-2009 pandemic, the currently circulating seasonal influenza A strain in the U.S.

Additionally, if your laboratory's influenza test is not designed to provide influenza A subtyping results, please forward positive influenza A specimens to DCLS for further influenza A virus characterization, including influenza A/H5N1.

Instructions for [Submitting Influenza PCR Specimens](#) and the [DCLS Test Request Form](#) are available on the DCLS website. For any additional guidance related to specimen collection, handling, transport, testing or any technical questions please reach out to:

- Dr. LaToya Griffin-Thomas (Lead Scientist, DCLS) at 804-648-4480, x281
- Sean Kelly (Group Manager, DCLS) at 804-648-4480, x227

- DCLS Emergency/After Hours Phone at 804-335-4617
- For specimen collection/shipping kit requests, please send requests to DCLS_SSSKits@dgs.virginia.gov
- For guidance related to specimen transport to DCLS, please contact Terri Harper (Group Manager, DCLS) at 804-648-4480, x140

Specimens may be tested for surveillance purposes via batching and patient specific reports may not be returned to the submitter in a timely matter.

We will continue to keep you informed of any updates as this guidance may change if new information is learned or the H5N1 outbreak situation changes. Thank you for your partnership with public health and DCLS.

Sincerely,

Denise M. Toney

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Director

Additional Resources

- [CDC Guidance to Commercial Laboratories on Increasing Submission of Influenza A and B Positive Samples to State and Local Public Health Laboratories for Additional Subtyping \(including H5\)](#)
- [CDC H5N1 Bird Flu: Current Situation Summary](#)
- [DCLS HPAI Testing Instructions 2024](#)
- [DCLS Influenza PCR Specimen Submission Instructions](#)
- [DCLS Test Request Form](#)
- [Instructions for Completing DCLS Test Request Form](#)