

May 4, 2009

MDCH BOL Swine Flu Update - #5

Dear Laboratory Colleagues:

Testing Approval

As we explained in an earlier Swine Flu Update, approval for testing should be obtained from local health authorities. Because these specimens may pass through several hands, it would expedite testing if the name and location of the local health staff approving the testing is written on the test request, in the lower right hand corner.

Prioritization of Testing

We are aware you are being deluged with specimens to test for swine flu. This is occurring nationwide, resulting in a tremendous test load for public health laboratories, and a strain on the ability of federal agencies to meet that need. On May 3, CDC indicated, in a document that has not been released as yet to the public, a plan with specific guidance on who should be tested. "Priority for testing includes persons who 1) require hospitalization *or* 2) are at high-risk for severe disease.... Not all people with suspected novel influenza infection need to have the diagnosis confirmed, especially if the person resides in an affected area or if the illness is mild." We anticipate moving towards this plan as prevalence of the virus in our state increases. Therefore it would also be helpful to note on the test requisition if the patient is hospitalized, as we will give these samples testing priority as our resources are reduced.

Performance of Rapid Flu Assays

We understand many clinicians also order rapid Flu A tests on these specimens, although performance of these tests with this novel influenza strain has not been established (http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/rapid_testing.htm). As we have reached the end of the seasonal flu season, we expect your stock of rapid flu test reagents is probably low, so you are experiencing a strain on reagents as well as staff resources. Thus we urge you to share the above referenced guidance document for clinicians broadly in your medical community.

Reporting

All laboratory results are reported via our LIS in the normal manner, either fax or USPS as arranged by each account. Results will automatically be available in MDSS when released to the LIS. We understand the anxiety which prompts providers to call for results, but this only delays the reporting process, so we urge patience.

The initial labeling of this novel influenza virus as "swine flu" has caused significant impact on the swine industry and upon US exports, resulting in an effort to find a neutral nomenclature. As this 'swine flu' A strain is an H1N1 subtype, we must assure our test reports differentiate from the A(H1N1) which is currently circulating as a seasonal flu, along with an H3N2 and an influenza B. BOL reporting of tests for this novel strain for the time being will use the terminology influenza A (H1 S-OIV*); the test result will be reported as positive for Flu A/swH1.

* Swine-origin influenza virus

Special delivery option for swine flu samples only

An additional option to facilitate delivery of swine flu samples to Lansing from clinical laboratories is available starting today, Monday May 4, for clinical labs in lower Michigan. Your Regional LRN Laboratory located in Kalamazoo, Oakland, City of Detroit, Saginaw and Grand Rapids will be a collection point for swine flu samples that need to be shipped to Lansing. They will be accepted between the hours of 9 AM and 3 PM Monday thru Friday. They will be transported to Lansing once per day. Your facility is responsible for the delivery to your Regional LRN Laboratory. At this time, we are not able to support this type of transport service to upper lower Michigan or UP labs in this non-emergent event.

These swine flu specimens, at the time they are delivered to the regional lab, must:

- Be labeled appropriately(patient identifying information, date of collection)
- Be double bagged
- Have absorbent material inserted in the inner bag with the specimen
- Have the test requisition in the outer bag
- Biohazard marking on the outer bag
- Be kept cold and transported on cold packs.

You can still use your normal shipment method if you choose (UPS, FedEx, USPS, private courier).

Please email your questions/concerns on flu testing to Dr. Anthony Muyombwe (muyombwea@michigan.gov) or Patty Clark (clarkp@michigan.gov). Issues with supplies can be directed to Val Reed (reedv@michigan.gov) or Marty Boehme (boehmem@michigan.gov).