



INTRODUCTION

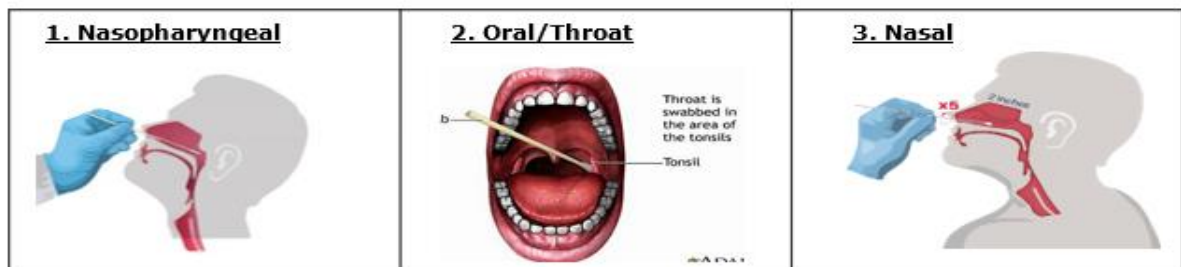
The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) provides testing for influenza and other respiratory viruses using surveillance specimens from patients showing symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI). This testing is part of the WHO-Collaborating Laboratory Influenza Surveillance Program. Results from these tests, along with further analysis conducted by the CDC on a subset of specimens, help track the types and subtypes of influenza in circulation, monitor antiviral resistance patterns, guide the selection of vaccine strains for the upcoming influenza season, and identify novel or mutated strains of influenza, including those originating from animals.

RECOMMENDED SPECIMEN TYPES

- A. Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab (preferred and required for the full respiratory panel)
- B. Oropharyngeal (OP) or Throat Swab
- C. Anterior Nasal/Nasal

SPECIMEN COLLECTION INSTRUCTIONS

- A. Respiratory swabs are collected in 15 mL screw-capped tube with 3 mL of transport medium VTM/UTM.
- B. Regular-size flocked swabs with a synthetic tip (e.g., polyester or Dacron®) and an aluminum or plastic shaft. Swabs with cotton tips and wooden shafts are not acceptable. Specimens collected with swabs made of calcium alginate are not acceptable.
 1. Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab (preferred and required for the full respiratory panel)
 - Pass the NP swab through the nares. (See diagram below)
 - Resistance will be met, confirming contact with the nasopharynx.
 - Rub the swab tip several times across the mucosal surface. This will loosen and collect cellular material. Allow a time of contact of up to 30 seconds.
 - Withdraw the swab and place it in the viral transport media. Make sure the liquid medium covers the swab tip. Break or cut the end of the swab and screw the vial lid on tightly.
 2. Oropharyngeal (OP) or Throat Swab
 - Using plastic-handled swab, vigorously swab both the tonsils and the posterior pharynx. (See diagram below)
 - Place the swab into the transport media. Make sure the liquid medium covers the swab tip.
 - Break or cut the end of the swab. Screw the vial lid on tightly.
 3. Anterior Nasal/Nasal
 - Insert the entire soft end of the swab into your nostril no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch (1.5 cm). (See diagram below)
 - Slowly rotate the swab, gently pressing against the inside of your nostril at least 4 times for a total of 15 seconds. Get as much nasal discharge as possible on the soft end of the swab.
 - Using the same swab, repeat swabbing in your other nostril with the same end of the swab.
 - Place the swab in the sterile tube and snap off the end of the swab at the break line, so that it fits comfortably in the tube. Place the cap on the tube and screw down tightly to prevent leakage.





SPECIMEN LABELING AND STORAGE

1. Label specimen containers: Patient's first and last name (no nicknames or abbreviations) and collection date AND at least one of the following: patient's date of birth, both age AND gender, OR MRN.
2. If specimens are unable to be shipped immediately, refrigerate specimens at 2 – 8°C until ready to ship. If the specimens cannot arrive at the Bureau of Laboratories within 24-48 hours of collection, freeze and ship them frozen for the next business day.

SPECIMEN SUBMISSION DOCUMENTS

1. Please include a BOL submission form with each test request.
[BOL Micro Specimen Submission Form.pdf \(pa.gov\)](#)
2. Laboratory Test(s) Requested: **Influenza Surveillance**
3. Fill in the submission form with the patient's name (last, first, middle), complete address, (street address, city, zip code, and county), DOB, gender, date of collection, and specimen source.
4. The submitter's name, complete address, and contact information, including phone and fax numbers are required for proper result reporting.
5. The information on the submission form must match the two patient identifiers on the specimen label. The specimen will be rejected if identifiers fail to match the specimens and accompanying paperwork.
6. For subtype negative (as per criteria in the letter), please include a copy of your laboratory's results including the cycle threshold (PCR- Ct values) when available.

SPECIMEN PACKAGING AND SHIPPING

1. Place the tube in the compartment of the biohazard bag and seal the bag. Place the paperwork in the outer pocket of the biohazard bag.
2. Ship the specimen as soon as possible after collection. In case of delay, store the specimen at 2 - 8°C until shipping and no longer than 24-48 hrs. If a longer delay in shipping is anticipated, freeze the specimen at –20°C or lower.
3. Ship as a **Category B** diagnostic specimen to the address on the submission form and include a return address.
4. Call Quick Courier at **800-355-1004** to request overnight pickup of a “**Flu Pickup Account #PA-BOLOT**” package for next-day delivery to the Bureau of Laboratories.
5. For regular surveillance specimens, a dispatcher will pick up the specimen and deliver it to the Bureau of Laboratories the next business day. Calls to Quick Courier must be made by noon for delivery the next business day.
6. **Do not** ship specimens out on Fridays, weekends, days before a holiday, or on holidays.
7. To submit a “**subtype negative**” influenza A virus specimen, call the PA DOH BOL at 484-870-6380 for expedited courier service.

Contact **Hephzibah Tagaram Ph.D., Virology & Immunology Supervisor**, at **484-870-6380** or htagaram@pa.gov if you have questions.