

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

Diagnostic Testing for Suspect Influenza, 2025-26 Season Laboratory Guidance

The Montana Public Health Laboratory (MTPHL) offers accurate and timely molecular (RT-PCR) testing for Influenza A & B, as well as subtyping and genotyping for Influenza positive specimens. Early diagnosis of influenza can reduce the inappropriate use of antibiotics and provide the option of using antiviral therapy. Subtyping and genotyping provide additional data about the strains that are circulating in your jurisdiction, including novel strains.

Specimen Collection

- ❑ Specimens should be collected within 24-72 hours of symptoms onset. After 3 days, the viral shedding is reduced, and may no longer be detectable, depending on the assay.
- ❑ Respiratory Specimens (nasopharyngeal swabs, throat swabs, nasal swabs, combination NP/Throat swabs) must be submitted in Universal Transport Media (UTM) or Viral Transport Media (VTM) in a cold condition.

Failure to submit in UTM or VTM will cause the specimen to be rejected as an “Unsatisfactory Specimen”.

- ❑ **Do not** submit a swab or residual fluid that has been used for Rapid Influenza Diagnostic Tests (RIDTs); these will be rejected as an unsatisfactory specimen. A second swab must be collected and submitted in UTM.

NOTE: Make sure the transport media is being stored appropriately. Some transport media can be stored at room temperature, and others must be stored refrigerated. After the specimen has been introduced to the transport media, the specimen should be stored cold and transported to the MTPHL in a cold condition. Please freeze if there is going to be a delay in transport >3 days.

- ❑ Specimens can be transported as a Biologic Substance, Category B, and should be received within 48 hours of collection.

Rapid Influenza Diagnostic Tests (RIDTs)

- ❑ MTPHL can confirm positive RIDT results by RT-PCR. If the specimen is positive for Influenza A, subtyping will be performed. If the specimen is positive for Influenza B, genotyping will be performed to identify the lineage.
- ❑ Specimens that are rapid-test negative for Influenza from patients exhibiting symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI) should be confirmed by a more sensitive test (RT-PCR) if determined by the clinician to be highly suspect of Influenza.

Respiratory Panel (Influenza A, Influenza B, SARS-CoV-2, and RSV)

- ❑ MTPHL also offers a respiratory panel for patients exhibiting symptoms of ILI.
 - To order, select “**Resp Panel**” on the online portal
 - Submit an NP swab in viral transport medium (VTM) or Universal Transport Media (UTM)

Fees

Diagnostic influenza testing is still being offered at a reduced rate for the 2025-2026 season. The fee for an Influenza A and B PCR screen (CPT code 87502) is \$60. All Influenza A positive specimens will be subtyped (CPT code 87503; \$35) and all influenza B specimens will be genotyped (CPT code 87503; \$35) to identify the lineage. The viral Respiratory Panel is also available at a reduced rate. (CPT code 87631; \$65). Viral culture is no longer available at MTPHL.

Online Requisition Form

- ☐ On the online order screen, select “**Inf A-B PCR**”, not “*Inf PCR Surv*” (*this is for surveillance only*).
- ☐ Please complete all requested information, including the clinical information questions that pop-up on the screen, as appropriate.

Turn Around Time

- ☐ Turnaround time is expected to be less than 48 hours from specimen receipt, although this time may vary.

If you have any questions, please call the Montana Public Health Laboratory at 1-800-821-7284.

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