

May 6, 2009

To: Manitoba Clinical Laboratories, Medical Officers of Health

RE: Laboratory Considerations in Investigating Novel Influenza A (H1N1) (Swine)

Dear Colleagues,

The recent detections of widespread human-to-human transmitted novel influenza A (H1N1) (swine) have resulted in many questions regarding clinical testing for this agent. This letter is meant to provide some brief guidance for laboratories in Manitoba.

Indications:

SUSPECT novel influenza A cases may no longer have a history of travel to an affected area such as Mexico. Manitoba Health and Healthy Living is stressing that those with severe respiratory illness or significant influenza-like illness (in whom antiviral treatment or hospitalization might be considered) should be tested for novel influenza A. Those with mild illness do not require testing unless management is likely to be affected.

Specimen Collection:

The appropriate specimen for novel influenza A testing is:

- A nasopharyngeal swab is preferred. A throat swab, nasopharyngeal aspirate, tracheal aspirate or bronchial wash may be adequate. In all cases, the specimen should be collected with a nasopharyngeal (wire) swab or flocked (microRheologics) swab and placed in viral transport medium (VTM). Collection of one specimen should occur in the first few days of illness.
- An appropriately labeled Cadham Provincial Laboratory requisition MUST accompany the specimen. The requisition MUST include a practitioner telephone number for urgent result reporting, the case symptoms and the exposure of concern. Those inadequately labeled may not be processed.
- Influenza A results will currently be available within 2 working days of the properly collected and labeled specimen's arrival at CPL. Novel influenza A results will take an additional 24-48 hours.
- Rapid antigen testing for Influenza A is not recommended, as it is felt that it lacks sensitivity for the swine influenza virus.
- Serology is not yet known to be useful. Serology is available through the National Microbiology Laboratory and is currently recommended for severe disease only.

Supplies:

Supplies for testing for the novel influenza A may be obtained on an ongoing as-needed basis from Cadham Provincial Laboratory mail room at 945-6806. CPL will not provide stockpile volumes of supplies such as VTM, swabs or requisitions to clients.

Biosafety Precautions:

At the present time, biosafety precautions require a minimum of BCL-2 practices. Routine respiratory bacteriology may employ routine BCL-2 practices. Manipulation of respiratory specimens for viruses should consider the Interim Guidelines posted by the Public Health Agency of Canada at:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ols-bsl/banhsi-abnhgp-eng.php>

Transport of Specimens:

Please be reminded that diagnostic specimens must be shipped according to Transport of Dangerous Goods Regulations, principally as UN 3373 Biological Substance, Category B. Known positive samples or cultures of virus must be sent UN 2814 Infectious Substance.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours Sincerely,

"Original signed by Paul Van Caesele"

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