

SENTINEL SURVEILLANCE FOR INFLUENZA (THE FLU) - HOW TO GET STARTED

I'm interested in participating in Sentinel Surveillance. How do I get started?

The Respiratory Disease team at VDH will pass that information along to the public health lab- Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS). A survey will be provided to determine the appropriate number of specimen collection kits that is needed. DCLS will mail your facility specimen collection kits to participate in the sentinel surveillance (SS) program. The Respiratory Disease Team will also set up a virtual meeting for your staff to get you oriented to the program.

What time of the year should I start collecting specimens?

For the 2022-23 flu season, specimens should be collected starting October 2, 2022 and continue through October 1, 2023.

What does specimen collection entail?

Patients who meet the criteria for ILI should have a specimen collected for testing. For public health surveillance, ILI consists of a fever of 100°F or more with a sore throat and/or a cough. Specimens can be collected from anyone who meets the ILI criteria, regardless of whether or not they are diagnosed with influenza.

DCLS provides detailed instructions for specimen collection that will be provided with specimen collection kits. Specimens are then packaged at your facility and picked up via DCLS courier for transportation to the lab.

How many specimens should I collect?

In order to have confidence that we could identify viruses that are either novel or resistant to antivirals, we hope to receive approximately 175 specimens per week across the state throughout the year.

When should I be collecting specimens?

We ask that you collect specimens at the beginning of the week so that they can be mailed out by Wednesday. This allows for transit time and testing before the end of the week. Please keep in mind that DCLS should receive the specimens within 72 hours of collection. In your 72 hour time frame, please ensure to consider travel time. You can store them in a fridge until they are shipped. Please **DO NOT ship** any specimens on Friday or over the weekend, as specimens cannot be received by DCLS over the weekend.

How can I see the results?

DCLS will mail individual results back to you. VDH, at the state level, will also put together a report that includes the results from all of the specimens you've submitted so that you can see how the flu season is unfolding in your area. Please note, results are for participation purposes and not for diagnosis.

If you have any other questions, please contact
our flu email inbox at flu@vdh.virginia.gov
Thank you!

