



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

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To: All North Carolina Health Care Clinicians  
From: Erica Wilson, MD, MPH, Medical Epidemiologist  
Subject: 2019- 20 Influenza Season: **Testing Update for NC Clinicians (1 page)**  
Date: October 14, 2019

This memo provides information and guidance to NC clinicians regarding testing for flu in North Carolina. As guidance may change during the influenza season, up to date information will be available at [flu.nc.gov](http://flu.nc.gov).

### **TESTING**

Rapid influenza diagnostic test (RIDT) sensitivities are approximately 50–70% when compared with viral culture or reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR). Therefore, a negative RIDT does NOT rule out infection and should not be used for treatment or infection control decisions during periods when influenza is known to be circulating. When available, rapid molecular assays are preferred over RIDTs because of increased sensitivity (90-95%) and specificity. Additional information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis>.

Confirmatory influenza testing at the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health (SLPH) is primarily intended for virologic surveillance, rather than diagnostic purposes. This testing will focus on the following groups:

1. A sample of patients with influenza-like illness seen at facilities participating in the Influenza-Like Illness Network (ILINet).
2. Patients critically ill with influenza-like illness but have no laboratory evidence of influenza infection.
3. Patients who die with influenza-like illness but have no laboratory evidence of influenza infection; however, specimens from living patients are preferred.

Testing at the SLPH can also be considered for other patients in the following circumstances if consultation with the local health department determines that such testing is necessary for surveillance or to determine which control measures are needed: outbreaks in institutional settings, patients with recent swine or poultry exposure, and clusters of severe or unusual respiratory illness.

Specific guidance regarding specimen collection and transport is available on the “Providers” tab at [flu.nc.gov](http://flu.nc.gov).

Clinicians should contact their Local Health Departments or the Communicable Disease Branch epidemiologist on-call number (919-733-3419) for questions about influenza.

Updates with additional guidance will be posted as warranted on [flu.nc.gov](http://flu.nc.gov). Updates are also available from the CDC at [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu). Information about the ILINet program is available on the “Providers” tab at [flu.nc.gov](http://flu.nc.gov).

cc: Dr. Jean-Marie Maillard, Communicable Disease Branch Medical Director  
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