

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT
Accelerate Routine Testing of Influenza for Hospitalized Patients

January 23, 2025

Background:

Highly pathogenic avian influenza A(H5N1) viruses are currently affecting wild birds and many species of mammals. In the United States, there have been outbreaks with these viruses among poultry and dairy cows, as well as infections among other animals, including domestic cats. Since 2022, 67 total human cases of avian influenza A(H5) virus infection have been identified in the United States, with 66 of these cases occurring in 2024. Most infections in humans have been clinically mild, but one fatality has been reported.

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH), along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has routinely recommended influenza testing for hospitalized patients with suspected influenza. In light of the ongoing avian influenza A(H5N1) virus animal outbreak in the United States, NMDOH and CDC recommend that clinicians and laboratories promptly subtype all influenza A specimens among hospitalized patients, especially those in the intensive care unit (ICU). Identifying influenza A specimens that cannot be subtyped to seasonal strains and then sending the specimens for further subtyping will enhance our ability to detect novel influenza strains in a timely fashion.

Recommendation for Clinicians:

NMDOH now recommends that all influenza A positive respiratory specimens from hospitalized patients, especially from those in an ICU, be subtyped for seasonal influenza A viruses [A(H1) and A(H3)] as soon as possible following admission—ideally within 24 hours. Any influenza A positive specimen that cannot be subtyped to current seasonal strains (i.e., reported as unsubtypeable), should be sent to the Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD) for further characterization.

- If the initial diagnostic test does not subtype [e.g., identify A(H1) and A(H3)], order an influenza A subtyping diagnostic test within 24 hours of hospital admission for patients who tested positive for influenza A.
 - Point of care/rapid antigen influenza tests do not detect subtypes, so all of these tests should be followed up with a subtyping assay.
- Subtyping should be performed with assays available to the testing laboratory, as follows:
 - Subtyping tests should be performed in the hospital clinical laboratory, if available.
 - Alternatively, specimens should be sent to a commercial clinical laboratory.
 - If influenza A virus subtyping is not available through one of these routes, arrangements can be made for influenza A virus-positive specimens to be subtyped at the Scientific Laboratory Division. Please contact SLD at 505-383-9000 for guidance.
- Samples submitted to the Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD) must be submitted refrigerated in Viral Transport Medium within 72 hours of collection. If needed, collection kits can be ordered from SLD.

PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Any hospitalized patients, especially those in an ICU, with suspected influenza should be started on antiviral treatment with oseltamivir as soon as possible without waiting for the results of influenza testing.

Notify NMDOH (1-833-796-8773) promptly of an influenza A unsubtypable result or if avian influenza A(H5N1) virus infection is suspected or confirmed.

Recommendation for Laboratories:

Respiratory specimens that are positive for influenza A but negative for seasonal influenza A virus subtypes [i.e., negative for A(H1) and A(H3)] should be sent to SLD as soon as possible and within 24 hours of obtaining the results and NMDOH should be notified (833-796-8773). Do not batch specimens for consolidated or bulk shipment to the public health laboratory if that would result in shipping delays for any such specimen.

If influenza A virus subtyping is not available at the hospital or the clinical laboratory of the treating facility, NMDOH should be notified, and arrangements made for influenza A virus-positive respiratory specimens to be subtyped at SLD or a commercial laboratory with this testing capability. Submitters should write “Hospitalized” under the “Influenza RT-PCR” test request on the submission form to ensure specimens are prioritized.

Additional Resources:

CDC HAN 00520: Accelerated Subtyping of Influenza A in Hospitalized Patients

NMHealth HPAI Information for Clinicians and Providers

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A(H5N1) Virus: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations

[New Mexico Scientific Laboratory - Biological Sciences Bureau Directory of Services](#)

New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please fill out the registration form completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

Please Note that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number **(855) 596-1810** as the “**New Mexico Health Alert Network**” default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.