



# County of Erie

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

**HEALTH ADVISORY #239**

**MAY 12, 2009**

## **HEALTH ADVISORY: NOVEL INFLUENZA A H1N1 (SWINE FLU) VIRUS UPDATE**

*Please distribute immediately to Community providers, staff in the Departments of Laboratory Medicine, Critical Care, Emergency Medicine, Family Practice, Internal Medicine, Infectious Disease, Infection Control, Pediatrics, Pulmonary Medicine, and all inpatient and outpatient units.*

The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) received confirmation from Wadsworth Laboratory of a confirmed positive case of Novel Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu) infection. The patient is a student at Transit Middle School in the Williamsville School District. The child presented to the family pediatrician on May 5<sup>th</sup> with a fever of 102°, body aches, chest congestion, and sore throat. The child was treated as an outpatient with Tamiflu® and is no longer symptomatic. The patient had no known epidemiological link.

Because of the confirmation of this first case, patients in Erie County with **fever  $\geq 100^\circ$  AND either a cough OR runny nose OR nasal congestion OR sore throat** are now considered *suspect* cases regardless of any other epidemiological link. However, it is important to note that most cases outside of Mexico continue to be mild, and treatment may or may not be indicated based upon treatment guidelines previously provided by the New York State Department of Health. Since there is limited swine flu laboratory testing capacity, patient care should be based on history, physical, and any other appropriate laboratory testing (e.g., influenza A, strep screen) and by using the new case definition. Of importance, limited laboratory testing continues to reveal more cases of human influenza A than swine flu. We ask that suspect cases with mild illness NOT be routinely reported to us.

The Erie County Public Health Laboratories (ECPHL) has recently satisfied the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) performance requirements to perform confirmatory swine flu testing. However, our limited laboratory testing capacity for swine flu will be utilized for epidemiological purposes such as characterization of the distribution of the disease in the community, and cannot be made widely available for the purposes of individual patient care decisions.

To determine the extent of Novel Influenza A H1N1 illness in the community, the ECDOH will continue to conduct active epidemiologic surveillance and targeted investigations including laboratory testing. While the results from ECPHL testing can be used for the benefit of those individual patients who are tested, it is important to again note that the primary purpose of testing will be for epidemiological purposes. We request that health care providers assist us in case finding individuals for confirmatory testing who satisfy our geographic, demographic, and other priority surveillance criteria outlined below.

1. Hospitalized patients
2. Health care workers
3. Individuals working in or individuals living in a residential institutional or group facility (group home, nursing home, correctional facility, college dormitory, etc.) **without** a previously identified probable or confirmed case
4. Individuals working in or individuals attending a non-residential facility or other group gathering (school, daycare, large community based organization, etc.) **without** a previously identified probable or confirmed case

It is also important to note that the ECDOH may alter these criteria and *may* consider further laboratory testing in a facility or group setting with previously confirmed Novel Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu) based on laboratory capacity.

Providers should utilize the attached document: Directions for Collection and Transport of Specimen for Laboratory Analysis for Novel Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu) for specimen collection and transport guidance.

Questions regarding this advisory should be directed to the ECDOH at **(716) 858-7697**.

**Health Category Definitions:**

**Health Alert FLASH:** conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

**Health Alert Priority:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary

## **Directions for Collection and Transport of Specimen for Laboratory Analysis for Novel Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu)**

**HISTORY AND SPECIMEN LABELING:** Fill in PATIENT HISTORY/LABORATORY REQUISITION form as completely as possible. Each specimen should be labeled with patient name and the date/ collected.

**RESPIRATORY TRACT SPECIMENS:** Respiratory specimens should be collected as soon as possible in the course of illness. The likelihood of recovering most viruses diminishes markedly >72 hours after symptom onset. Nasopharyngeal swabs are the preferred specimen type for Novel Influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) testing. Nasal aspirates, NP/OP swabs, and throat swabs will also be accepted.

Collection of nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate: Have the patient sit with the head tilted backward. Instill 1.0 - 1.5 ml of non-bacteriostatic saline (pH 7.0) into one nostril. Flush a plastic catheter or tubing with 2-3 ml of saline. Insert the tubing into the nostril parallel to the palate. Aspirate nasopharyngeal secretions. Repeat this procedure with the other nostril. Collect specimens in labeled sterile vials. Ship sample immediately on cold packs.

Collection of nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swabs: Use only sterile dacron or rayon swabs with plastic handles. Do NOT use cotton or calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden sticks as they may contain substances that may inhibit PCR.

- Nasopharyngeal swabs: Insert swab into nostril parallel to the palate and leave in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions. Swab both nostrils.
- Oropharyngeal swabs: Swab both posterior pharynx and tonsillar areas, avoiding the tongue. Place swabs immediately into labeled sterile tubes containing viral transport medium. Break applicator sticks off below the edge of the tube to permit tightening of the cap. Ship sample immediately on cold packs.

**It is essential that specimens be transported to the Erie County Public Health Laboratories as soon as possible after collection. All paperwork must be complete and accompany each specimen.**

- **It is the shipper's responsibility to package and transport specimens in accordance with applicable IATA/USDOT regulations. Please contact your carrier for additional shipping and packaging information.**
- If specimen is shipped within 2 days of collection, it must be refrigerated at 4°C until shipped and shipped on commercially manufactured cold packs. DO NOT use wet ice.
- If specimen will be shipped >2 days after collection, it must be stored frozen and shipped on dry ice.
- All specimens must be shipped "Priority Overnight" and received within 24 hours via chosen carrier.
- Specimens must be shipped or otherwise transported to arrive at the laboratory Monday-Friday, so that appropriate laboratory personnel can be present to accept and accession specimens.
- If expedited shipping is required (e.g. after-hours and weekends), prior laboratory approval is required. Please contact the ECPHL to discuss.

**Laboratory contact information:**

General Business #: (716) 898-6100  
(M-F, 8:30am to 4:30pm)

**After-hours Duty Officer: (716) 961-7898**  
[ecphl@erie.gov](mailto:ecphl@erie.gov)

**Shipping address:**

Erie County Public Health Laboratories  
462 Grider Street  
Clinical Center Building AA  
Buffalo, NY 14215