

Laboratory testing for respiratory viruses: 20 June 2009

In recent days there has been a significant increase in the number of people diagnosed with seasonal influenza (influenza A/H1 (human) and A/H3), as well as an increasing number of persons with the H1N1 influenza 09 (human swine influenza) infection. H1N1 influenza 09 still remains less common than seasonal influenza, in particular influenza A/H3. Community transmission of H1N1 influenza 09 is occurring in some areas of NSW.

The Australian Government announced a new response phase 'PROTECT' on 17 June 2009 and NSW moved to this phase. The focus in the PROTECT phase is on early treatment of those with moderate or severe illness and consideration of treatment based on clinical judgement for those with mild disease but at risk of severe illness.

Laboratory testing for influenza is not required for patients to receive anti-influenza medication. Please see <http://www.emergency.health.nsw.gov.au/swineflu/index.asp> for details of eligibility for free anti influenza treatment.

If laboratory testing for respiratory infection is required for clinical management of symptomatic patients, then requests should state:

- 'influenza' if you require testing for seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza 09
- 'respiratory virus' if a broader range of respiratory virus testing is required.

Laboratory testing should not be performed for asymptomatic patients.

Respiratory specimens (one throat and one nasal swab in viral transport medium) should be submitted to your usual pathology service. Results will be available only through their normal reporting system. The NSW Health result enquiry hotline for verbal H1N1 influenza 09 results will be phased out as we revert to the usual practice for respiratory virus testing.

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