



Messenger

Influenza Seasonal Surveillance

Influenza surveillance for the 2022-2023 season officially began on Sunday, October 2, 2022. As in previous years, the County of San Luis Obispo (SLO) Public Health Laboratory is soliciting specimens (nasopharyngeal swab in viral transport medium) to monitor the prevalence of circulating subtypes and detect novel influenza strains. The submission of specimens allows public health officials to understand the dynamics of influenza transmission, to provide guidance on antiviral therapy, and to develop effective vaccines.

- **Hospitals:** Submit specimens from patients hospitalized with influenza-like illness (ILI) regardless of rapid or PCR test result. For free testing, write the dates of hospitalization on the requisition (e.g., "Admitted 12/15/22, moved to ICU 12/17/22").
- **Outpatient Healthcare Providers:** Submit specimens from patients with ILI and a positive influenza test. For free testing, write the rapid or PCR test results on the requisition (e.g., "Rapid A+" or "PCR B+" 12/15/22).

Some health experts are predicting an increase in cases above previous years based on heightened influenza activity in Australia over their winter. Factors that seemed to have contributed to a bad flu season in the southern hemisphere include reduced immunity to influenza due to less exposure and the lifting of social-distancing and masking restrictions.

Monkeypox (MPX) Testing Update

The SLO Public Health Laboratory acts as a reference for SLO, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties, performing non-variola orthopoxvirus PCR testing to detect MPX in patients with suspect lesions. Positive specimens are referred to the CDC for further characterization. To date, testing demand has remained at a steady, low level. In related news, the SLO Public Health Department has extended the availability of the Jynneos vaccine to health care workers who are likely to examine or collect laboratory specimens from persons with MPX. Further information can be found at: www.slocounty.ca.gov/mpx.

Enterovirus and Acute Flaccid Myelitis

The California Department of Public Health is continuing to evaluate the occurrence of severe respiratory disease associated with enterovirus D68 (EV-D68), particularly in pediatric patients. Previous surges in EV-D68-associated respiratory illness have preceded cases of acute flaccid myelitis (AFM). The SLO Public Health Laboratory can detect rhinovirus/enterovirus using a Biofire respiratory panel and then confirm the presence of enterovirus by PCR. Respiratory specimens from patients with AFM should be submitted for further testing for EV-D68.

COVID-19 Sequencing

Beyond performing outbreak testing for COVID-19, the SLO Public Health Laboratory also actively sequences for circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants within the county. The laboratory has now sequenced more than 1700 specimens and has observed variants from all major lineages

including Alpha, Gamma, Delta, and Omicron. As of October 7, 2022, Omicron is currently the only circulating variant in the county, with the BA.5 sublineage accounting for 90% of the strains in the community. Of note, the BQ.1 subvariant was detected for the first time.

Holiday Schedule

The laboratory will be closed on the following days:

Friday, November 11—Veterans Day

Thursday-Friday, November 24, 25—Thanksgiving

Friday, December 26—Christmas

Friday, January 2—New Year's

Questions?

Please contact the Laboratory Director by phone at 805-781-5512 or email at gmmiller@co.slo.ca.us

