

Standard practical advice for investigating individuals with possible swine influenza infection



v1 30 April 2009

1. Which patients should be tested?

Currently we do not have transmission of swine influenza A within the UK.

To be considered for testing a patient should have:

- Fever greater or equal to 38°C **or** history of fever, **AND** flu-like illness or other severe illness suggestive of an infective process

AND

- Onset within **seven** days of travel from an area known to have cases of swine influenza. The updated list is available at on the HPA website.

2. Who do I contact for advice and access to testing service?

If the patient meets the criteria as a possible case of swine influenza, contact your local health protection unit (HPU).

The HPU will review case details with you and make an assessment as to whether the case needs testing for swine influenza A.

The HPU will advise you on the local arrangements for testing, the samples to take and transport of samples to the testing laboratory.

Usually you will be asked to take the test swab. The HPU will advise you on the recommended personal protective equipment (currently a surgical mask, gloves and a plastic apron).

3. Where should the patient be assessed?

Preferably at home. If at your surgery, then assessment should be undertaken away from communal areas. Please ensure all staff are aware of these arrangements.

Once assessed, if the patient is well enough to be at home then s/he should be advised to stay there. Give advice about:

- Seeking help if clinical condition worsens.
- Avoiding contact with other people until results of tests known.
- Respiratory and hand hygiene.
- Cleaning hard surfaces regularly with a standard cleaning preparation.

If the patient needs hospital admission then please arrange this, ensuring the admitting team and any ambulance staff are informed of the potential diagnosis, as the patient must go into a side-room isolation.

4. Which specimens should I take?

Combined nose and throat swabs should be taken and

placed into a bottle of viral transport medium, if possible duplicate samples should be taken:

- Use swabs with plastic shafts, as wooden swabs may affect the test.
- Combined nose and throat swabs must be taken and both placed into viral transport medium and sent to your local HPA/NHS laboratory. (See point 5).
- Please use the materials provided and do not use charcoal swabs or other bacteriological transport media.

5. How do I take the specimens?

Combined nose and throat swabs should be taken and placed into a bottle of viral transport medium, if possible duplicate samples should be taken:

The patient should wear a face mask (except while having samples taken). The staff member taking the swabs should wear a face mask, plastic apron and gloves.

The HPU will provide you with a pack where you will find:

- A request form
- Two bottles of viral transport medium (pink liquid)
- Two swabs
- Two sticky labels
- The packaging (sealable plastic bag, screw-top plastic canister, pre-labelled box) for the samples once taken.

Taking the swab

- **Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab collection:**
 - Assemble all supplies including the virus isolation kit, gloves, pen, scissors, etc.
 - If the viral transport medium (VTM) is frozen, allow it to thaw completely – usually takes 2-3 minutes when held in your hands.
 - Tilt the patient's head back **slightly**. Bend the flexible wire of the sterile NP swab in a small arc and **gently** insert the swab along the medial part of the septum, until it reaches the posterior nares.
 - Rotate the swab slightly several times to dislodge the columnar epithelial cells and then quickly remove the swab.
 - Insert the NP swab into the VTM, cutting the excess wire or breaking the swab to fit inside the tube. Firmly secure the cap.
- **Throat swab (TS) collection:**
 - Assemble all supplies, such as the virus isolation kit, gloves, pen, etc.
 - If the VTM is frozen, allow it to thaw completely – this usually takes 2-3 minutes when held in your hands.
 - Using the swab provided vigorously swab only the posterior pharyngeal wall^a.
 - Insert the swab into the cold VTM, and break off the shaft so that it does not protrude above the rim of the container. Firmly secure the cap.

- Label both bottles with the sticky labels (name, address, date of birth).
- Check that the request form is completed including

Health Protection Unit contact details

the contact details for receipt of the results (the HPU may have already done this for you).

- Place the two bottles of viral transport medium in the plastic bag and seal.
- Place the sealed bag in the plastic canister and screw shut.
- Place the request form and the canister in the cardboard box and close.
- Ensure the box is correctly labelled with the delivery address and contact numbers.

6. What should I do once I have taken specimens?

- Dispose of PPE as hazardous waste
- Wash hands thoroughly
- Call your local HPU to inform them that the sample has been taken and the precise location for collection by the courier company.
- The specimen should be given to the courier by the healthcare professional, not the patient.
- Specimens will be collected by the HPA courier and delivered to the nominated HPA laboratory.

7. Should I start the patient on antivirals?

If patient fulfils criteria for sampling then they should also start antivirals. Standard adult doses: oseltamivir 75mg bd for five days (age 13 and over), zanamivir 10mg bd for five days. [Please check the *British Neonatal Formulary* for dose in children]

Please contact your local HPU for advice on the local arrangements for the supply of antivirals for the patient in the current situation.

8. Do I, or any of my staff, need antivirals?

You do not need to take antivirals ahead of the sample result. If the patient's samples prove positive for influenza A, then you will be assessed for antiviral prophylaxis by the HPU.

9. What should I do about the close contacts of the patient?

If the case meets the criteria for testing for swine influenza A, then you should advise the patient to inform their close contacts and for these individuals to be vigilant for flu-like symptoms.

The HPU will also take information about close contacts but further action will only be required if the index case samples prove positive for influenza A.

The laboratories will be performing the assays at least twice a day and the results will be notified to you.

^aCotton swabs are not a suitable alternative but some chlamydia swabs are suitable and the manufacturers instructions should be consulted.

Health Protection Unit

London region

North East and North Central London
North West London
South West London
South East London

Contact number

020 7759 2860
020 8327 7181
020 8812 7850
020 3049 4280

South East region

Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Kent

Surrey Sussex:

Leatherhead
Chichester
Lewes
Thames Valley

0845 055 2022/02380 777222
01622 710161/08702 385154

01372 824262/08702 385156
01243 770772/08702 385156
01273 4030591/08702 385156
0845 279 9879/ 08702 385155

East of England region

Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire
Essex

Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridge:

Norfolk
Suffolk
Cambridgeshire

01462 705300
0845 1550069

01842 767757
01473 329583
01480 398607

East Midlands region

East Midlands North
Lincolnshire
East Midlands South

01623 819000
01476 514699
0116 263 1400

North East region

North East

0191 202 3888

North West region

Merseyside
Cheshire
Cumbria & Lancashire
Greater Manchester

0151 290 8360
0151 290 8360
01257 246450
01617 866710

South West region

Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire
Gloucestershire
Wiltshire
Dorset
Somerset
South West Peninsula and Cornwall
& Isles of Scilly
Devon

0117 900 2620
01453 829650
01380 814000
01202 851272
01823 287817

01726 627881
01803 861833/01726 627881

West Midlands region

Birmingham and Solihull
Coventry and Warwickshire
West Midlands North
West Midlands West

0121 255 0800
01926 478107
01785 221126
01562 756300

Yorkshire and Humber region

North Yorkshire
Humber
South Yorkshire
West Yorkshire

01904 567675
01482 672171
01142 428850
01132 840606