



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

Date: July 25, 2024

To: Medical Laboratory Directors, Local Health Departments, Health Care Providers

From: Robert A. Myers, Ph.D. 
Director, Laboratories Administration

RE: Influenza and Malaria/Babesia Specimen Submissions

Influenza

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus activity in the United States is ongoing. Therefore, to maintain vigilance for the appearance of A(H5N1) in Maryland, and in accordance with the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 10.06.01.03, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is reminding laboratories that they should continue to submit all influenza A positive specimens to the MDH Laboratory for typing and possible further characterization. As always, we request immediate submission of specimens from any suspected novel influenza A infections. Priority testing to detect non-seasonal influenza viruses, such as H5N1 or H7N9 will be done if patients meet recommended clinical and epidemiological criteria (contact your local health department to confirm criteria are met and to coordinate the submission of these specimens to the State Laboratory).

Please visit the laboratory website:

<https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/Pages/influenza.aspx>

and select Specimen Submission Guidelines for Suspect Influenza Virus Infection (10-31-2023) for more information on submitting influenza specimens to the MDH Laboratory.

Malaria/Babesia

Additionally, MDH would like to remind laboratories that cases of malaria in Maryland typically increase during summer months. In 2023, there was a locally acquired case of malaria identified in Maryland. Submission of malaria samples to the MDH Laboratory helps ensure timely confirmatory testing for patients. Also please keep in mind that cases of tick-borne Babesia *microti* infection (babesiosis) have also increased in recent years in Maryland and are sometimes misdiagnosed as malaria infections by microscopic examination of blood smears. Therefore, we would also request positive clinical materials remnant whole blood and stain slides also be promptly submitted to the MDH Laboratory for additional testing.

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Laboratories Administration is providing the following reminders and clarifications regarding required malaria clinical specimen submissions to the MDH Laboratories Administration.

1. Both malaria and babesiosis are reportable conditions in Maryland, and clinical materials are required to be submitted to MDH Laboratories Administration whenever laboratory evidence of Malaria or Babesia is identified.

For additional information, see MDH's List of Conditions to Report and Instructions for Reporting.

https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/IDEHASsharedDocuments/ReportableDisease_HCP.pdf

2. Please submit both stained slides and a whole blood specimen (EDTA tube) whenever possible, to enable MDH Laboratories Administration to conduct PCR analysis and possible nucleic acid sequencing for molecular epidemiology applications. Prompt submission of plasmodium-positive specimens ensures specimen integrity and improves the performance of molecular-based assays.

3. Carefully follow specimen submission instructions when sending clinical specimens to MDH Laboratories.

- Lab collection instructions for Malaria Identification and Quantitation can be found on page 97 of MDH's Guide to Public Health Laboratory Services.
<https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/docs/Guide%20to%20PH%20Lab%20Serv%20v3.0%20Guide%20Updated%201-2024%20Final.pdf>.
- For each specimen submitted, complete the yellow "Infectious Agents: Culture/Detection" form MDH 4676. Select the Blood Parasites test, enter B for specimen source (blood), indicate Malaria speciation or Babesia testing, and the patient's recent travel history.
https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/docs/MDH%204676%20Infectious%20Agent%20Culture%20Detection%205_2024.pdf

If you have questions regarding any of the above information, please contact the MDH Microbiology Laboratory at 443-681-3952.

cc: Dr. Nilesh Kalyanaraman
Dr. David Blythe
Dr. Monique Duwell
Dr. David Crum
Mr. Brian Bachaus
Ms. Curi Kim
Ms. Maya Monroe