

Ministry of Health

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September 14, 2023

MEMORANDUM

**TO: Vice Presidents, Clinical
Ontario Health**

**FROM: Dr. Kieran Moore,
Chief Medical Officer of Health**

RE: Avian Influenza Surveillance in Hospitalized Patients - Update

Dear colleagues,

This Memo is in follow-up to the Memo issued on April 25, 2023, regarding enhanced acute care surveillance for avian influenza in hospitalized patients tested for influenza.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 continues to circulate in Canada and internationally among domestic and wild birds, as well as detections in **wild and domestic mammals** that have had exposure to infected birds, including domestic cats and dogs. Fortunately, detection of H5N1 in humans remains relatively rare, and mainly occurring among individuals with occupational or other close contact with infected birds or contaminated environments.

While seasonal influenza activity is still low in Ontario, we anticipate an early season due to early activity in the Southern Hemisphere in 2023. As such, as of September 18, 2023, we are no longer recommending that influenza specimens from all hospitalized patients be routinely sent for sub-typing.

However, we are still asking for your cooperation in maintaining a heightened index of suspicion for patients with severe influenza as part of enhanced surveillance for avian influenza. This includes:

- Obtaining a history from individuals with severe influenza regarding potential exposures to infected birds or mammals, or to contaminated environmental surfaces, in the past 14 days prior to illness onset.
 - Notify your hospital infection prevention and control and your **local public health unit** if a relevant exposure is identified.
 - Further **information for health professionals** is available from the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- For patients with influenza and a relevant potential exposure, influenza A samples (non-H3/non-H1 samples, if known) should be forwarded to PHOL for sub-typing. For more information on laboratory testing, see **test information** from the Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL).

Any ill patient with a history of potential exposure to an infected bird or animal should be notified to the local public health unit for further evaluation and testing, including sub-typing if influenza A positive.

We will continue to monitor the epidemiology of avian influenza and provide updates as the outbreak evolves.

Thank you for your cooperation, and for more information on Avian Influenza, please visit the **Ontario frequently asked questions webpage**.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kieran Moore,
Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health

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