

Swabbing

An important part of the survey will also be taking swabs, 1 a week from patients suspected of having the flu. You will receive packs with appropriate instructions in due course, usually towards the end of October.

You are asked if possible to take one swab per week on a case of influenza. Obviously if you have no cases then you cannot take a swab. It is also recognised that at certain times you may be too busy to take a swab on that particular case but in general it is of immense benefit to take a swab from a case per week if you can.

Taking the swabs involves both throat and nasal swabs. With the nasal swab . the thin wire swab, try and introduce it into the nasal pharynx via the nostrils and rub it about a little. This is a little uncomfortable but if you can do in once in each nostril the pick-up rate is much better. Then put the swab into the medium and shake it about in the fluid, then discard the wire swab. With the throat swab . the solid stick swab try and rub it around the posterior pharynx as much as possible. Then break the top of the swab and put it into the medium bottle. Close the bottle and put it in the outer container,

Fill the form and put both into the provided Transport boxes and post it off.

Please note the following

- Generally you should take only one swab per week or two maximum.
- A case you take a swab on should be a case that you are already calling a case of influenza, the swab is only for confirmation or otherwise but is not relevant to the reporting of that case in that week.
- Therefore any case on which a swab is taken should be appearing in that weeks return irrespective of whether the result is back and/or whether the swab is positive or negative.
- Try and complete the form, some of the questions may seem daft but it has a set of international WHO recommended questions.

The viral transport medium that is used for the swabs is ideally kept frozen until shortly before use. It can be defrosted in about 15 minutes before use. I am the first to point out that the opportunity to swab is immediate only and we don't have freezers in our surgery.

Fortunately the transport medium can be kept safely in the vaccine fridge and is optimal for use for 3 weeks but in fact is still viable for up to 3 months, as the number of positive swabs the network has had amply demonstrates. However if it is in the fridge for more than 3 months you should probably get a fresh supply. All supplies can be ordered by mailing me the request.

Fresh medium will be sent to everyone sometime in Jan depending on the amount of flu activity.

If you require further supplies of anything to do with swabbing you should request this directly from the NVRL by e-mail or fax. Do not telephone as the requests cannot be dealt with by telephone. E-mail <mailto:nvrl@ucd.ie> making the subject line %Surveillance swabbing request+and in the body of the e-mail specify exactly what you require be it forms, wire swabs or viral transport medium etc. Please include your practice code. Alternatively send the same information by fax to 01 2697611.