Indiana Department of Health

Eric J. Holcomb
Governor

Kristina M. Box, MD, FACOG
State Health Commissioner

April 6, 2021

Dear Hospital Leaders:

The Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are conducting enhanced surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 variants. The goal of these efforts is to inform impact of these variants on COVID-19 treatment and vaccines and to help predict state and national surges.

To better identify and monitor variants circulating in Indiana, the Department is requesting that hospitals work to develop protocols to submit specimens from the following patients to the Indiana Department of Health Laboratories for sequencing:

1) Newly admitted patients who test positive for SARS-CoV-2 via molecular testing methods, especially patients where there is clinical suspicion for a variant. Examples include age <60 years old, previously vaccinated, part of an identified cluster of infections, and lack of comorbidities.
2) Patients who test positive for SARS-CoV-2 after being fully vaccinated with an FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine (two weeks following the last dose of a two-dose vaccine or one dose of Johnson & Johnson [Janssen] vaccine), especially patients requiring admission for their COVID-19 infections after being fully vaccinated.
3) Patients who are admitted after reinfection of SARS-CoV-2 (i.e., testing positive again at least 90 days after first lab-confirmed COVID-19 illness, or anyone testing positive again within 90 days from first illness that reported a recent [within 14 days] exposure to someone with lab-confirmed COVID-19).

Clinical specimens for sequencing must have a cycle threshold (CT) value, if known, of ≤28. A minimum of 500µL of the original specimen is needed. If the original specimen is not available, a new specimen may be collected and submitted for testing and subsequent sequencing. Specimens must be frozen at ≤-70°C within 72 hours of specimen collection. If unable to freeze specimens at ≤-70°C, specimens may be stored and shipped at refrigerated temperatures; these specimens must be received at Indiana Department of Health Labs within 72 hours of collection. Ship specimens to Indiana Department of Health Labs on dry ice if frozen at ≤-70°C or on ice packs if refrigerated in an insulated Category B shipper. Saturday deliveries must be couriered.

To initiate specimen submission, please fill out the IDOH COVID-19 Variant Testing Authorizations provider survey at the following link: https://redcap.isdh.in.gov/surveys/?s=97PTWFEAYD

If your specimen is approved for sequencing, you will immediately receive an email notification with your authorization ID and further instructions. Please remember to enter your unique authorization ID into the LimsNet specimen submission form.

If the specimen is confirmed to be a variant of concern, the IDOH will notify the local health department of jurisdiction to interview the case-patient according to CDC protocol. The CDC recommends the same isolation and quarantine guidance for these cases and their close contacts. Sequencing results are intended for public health and epidemiologic purposes only. According to federal CLIA regulations, these results should **NOT** be used for diagnosis, treatment, or assessment of patient health or management.

For further information on approved specimen testing, please call 317-921-5500 or email isdh-lab-info@isdh.IN.gov.

For questions about COVID-19 re-infections or vaccine breakthrough cases please contact Lauren Milroy, Vaccine-Preventable Disease Epidemiologist, at 317-234-2807 or lmilroy@isdh.in.gov.

For further information on the epidemiology of variant SARS-CoV-2 strains, please contact Sara Hallyburton, Respiratory Epidemiologist, at 317-234-2809 or shallyburton@isdh.in.gov during normal business hours.

Sincerely,

Pamela R. Pontones

Pam Pontones, MA
Deputy State Health Commissioner and State Epidemiologist