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DATE: October 4, 2023
TO: Select Nursing Homes
FROM: New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Wadsworth Center

ENHANCED COVID-19 NEW YORK STATE SURVEILLANCE: This communication contains follow-up information for nursing homes regarding specimen collection supplies and shipping materials for enhanced SARS-CoV-2 surveillance efforts.

The purpose of this message is to provide follow up to the Advisory "Enhanced COVID-19 New York State Surveillance" issued via the Health Commerce System on September 5, 2023, located here:

[https://commerce.health.state.ny.us/hpn/ctrldocs/alrtview/postings/Enhanced_submission_request_for_SCV2_sequencing_\(v9_1693942206963_0.5.23\)Fi.pdf](https://commerce.health.state.ny.us/hpn/ctrldocs/alrtview/postings/Enhanced_submission_request_for_SCV2_sequencing_(v9_1693942206963_0.5.23)Fi.pdf)

What to Expect

Note: the shipment of assets listed below will be sent to an individual listed in the role of Administrator, Administrator Backup or Director of Nursing for your facility in the Health Commerce System.

- One overpack box, per facility, containing:
 - 24 - tubes of room temperature-stable Universal Transport Medium (UTM)
 - 2 - refrigerated Category B shipping boxes with Styrofoam inserts
 - 6 - 95 kPa biohazard specimen bags
 - 6 - absorbent sheets, with sleeves
 - 4 large and 8 small refrigerant gel packs
 - Return packing material (bubble wrap sheets)
 - Box labels
 - 1 hard copy of the Advisory sent on September 5, 2023
- **Distribution of these supplies is expected to begin within the next 2 weeks.**

Upon Receipt of Shipment at Facility

- Remove the gel refrigerant packs and place in a -20°C **freezer** until specimens are ready to ship.
- Note: the UTM can be stored at room temperature until a specimen swab is added.

How to Use the Collection Supplies

- Collect positive specimens when your facility is experiencing an outbreak.
- For samples testing **positive by rapid tests**, including antigen tests, take **the swab used in the rapid test** and immediately **place in a tube of UTM**.

- Place the UTM that includes the swab in the **refrigerator** (2-8°C) until ready to ship. Each specimen tube must be clearly labeled with the person's first and last names, date of birth, and collection date.
- Collect between 6-12 individual positive specimens.
- Specimens should be shipped as close to collection date as possible, preferably with 24-48 hours, but no more than 5 days.
- Do not ship specimens on Fridays, Saturdays, or the day before a state holiday.

How to Package and Ship

- Pack the specimens in the box in accordance with International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations.
 - If there are no staff at your facility who are IATA trained and certified for specimen packing and shipping, please notify us by email to the address at the end of this notice.
- Place four small AND two large **frozen** gel refrigerant packs in each box.
- The box must contain a printed requisition form or an electronically generated shipping manifest.
- Refer to the September 5, 2023, Advisory (via link above OR included hard copy) for FedEx account number, designated shipping facility/address and site-specific instructions. Note: specimen boxes should be sent by **priority overnight delivery**.

Additional collection and shipping supplies might be distributed in the future **if** this enhanced BA.2.86 surveillance effort continues.

Nursing homes should review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website regularly for updated information:

- [Risk Assessment Summary for SARS CoV-2 Sublineage BA.2.86](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-19-variant.html)
<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-19-variant.html>
- [CDC Respiratory Virus Updates](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/index.html)
<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/index.html>
- [Update on SARS-CoV-2 Variant BA.2.86 Being Tracked by CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-19-variant-update-2023-09-15.html)
<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-19-variant-update-2023-09-15.html>

Please direct any questions to COVIDstrain@health.ny.gov