



# Department of Health

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**DATE:** September 5, 2023  
**TO:** Select Nursing Homes, Clinical Laboratories, Academic Medical Centers  
**FROM:** New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Wadsworth Center

## **ENHANCED COVID-19 NEW YORK STATE SURVEILLANCE: Request for additional sample submissions for genomic analysis in response to the emergence of new variant BA.2.86**

This request is being sent in response to the recent emergence of the new BA.2.86 SARS-CoV-2 variant.

- BA.2.86 presents a major evolutionary change in the SARS-CoV-2 virus, including more than 30 amino acid changes in the spike protein - a change similar to that which generated the change from Delta to Omicron.
- Analyses of the mutations indicate BA.2.86 is likely to have equal or greater immune evasion, both vaccine and infection induced, than previous variants.
- Whether BA.2.86 also has sufficient transmissibility to produce widespread disease is currently unknown, but its early simultaneous detection at globally widespread geographic locations has raised sufficient concern to initiate additional surveillance measures.
- Importantly, immunity from vaccination or prior infection still provides some protection against severe disease, even for greatly mutated variants.

For more information, please see the current risk assessment on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web site:

<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-19-variant.html>

Additional measures are in place to enhance the capability to detect BA.2.86 in NYS wastewater. On August 29, 2023, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reported the first detection of BA.2.86 in NYS wastewater. To date, BA.2.86 has not been detected in a clinical sample in NYS.

**We are requesting the submission of available COVID-19-positive clinical samples** from your facility that meet the criteria described below, for sequencing, to assist in the detection of BA.2.86 and in tracking its spread in NYS as early as possible.

**For nursing homes only**

The Department is in the process of arranging for shipment of specimen collection supplies and shipping materials to nursing homes who are part of this effort. Additional information related to these shipments is forthcoming and will be issued in a subsequent communication.

If your facility already sequences SARS-CoV-2 positive specimens and you detect BA.2.86, please immediately notify the Wadsworth Center contacts in the table below.

Otherwise, please submit positive samples as follows:

- For facilities experiencing **outbreaks**, please submit no more than **6 to 12 samples** per 2-week period.
- For samples testing **positive by molecular amplification** assays, an indication of viral load is needed and submitted samples should have **Ct values below 33**.
- A **minimum of 200 microliters (µL)** of specimen is required for sequencing; however, additional volume is preferred whenever possible.
- Please **do not preselect samples** based on any mutation detecting assays (if applicable).
- For samples testing **positive by rapid tests**, including antigen tests, **the swab used in the rapid test** should be immediately **placed in a tube of viral transport medium (VTM)**, which can then be submitted for sequencing.
  - Note – the VTM being supplied by NYS to long term care facilities (with >100 residents) is **room temperature stable** and does not have to be stored refrigerated. However, once a specimen swab is added, it must be refrigerated and shipped on a frozen cold pack, preferably within 24 hours of collection.
  - **Positive samples** are acceptable from all cases, **regardless of symptoms**.
- Samples should be
  - **Clearly labeled** with the person's first and last names, DOB, and date of collection.
  - Enclosed in a **specimen bag** and accompanied with a printed requisition form unless accessioning a web site requisition as indicated in the links in the table below.
  - Packaged for **shipment in accordance with International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations**.

**Shipping costs are being covered**; please **use the following FedEx account**:

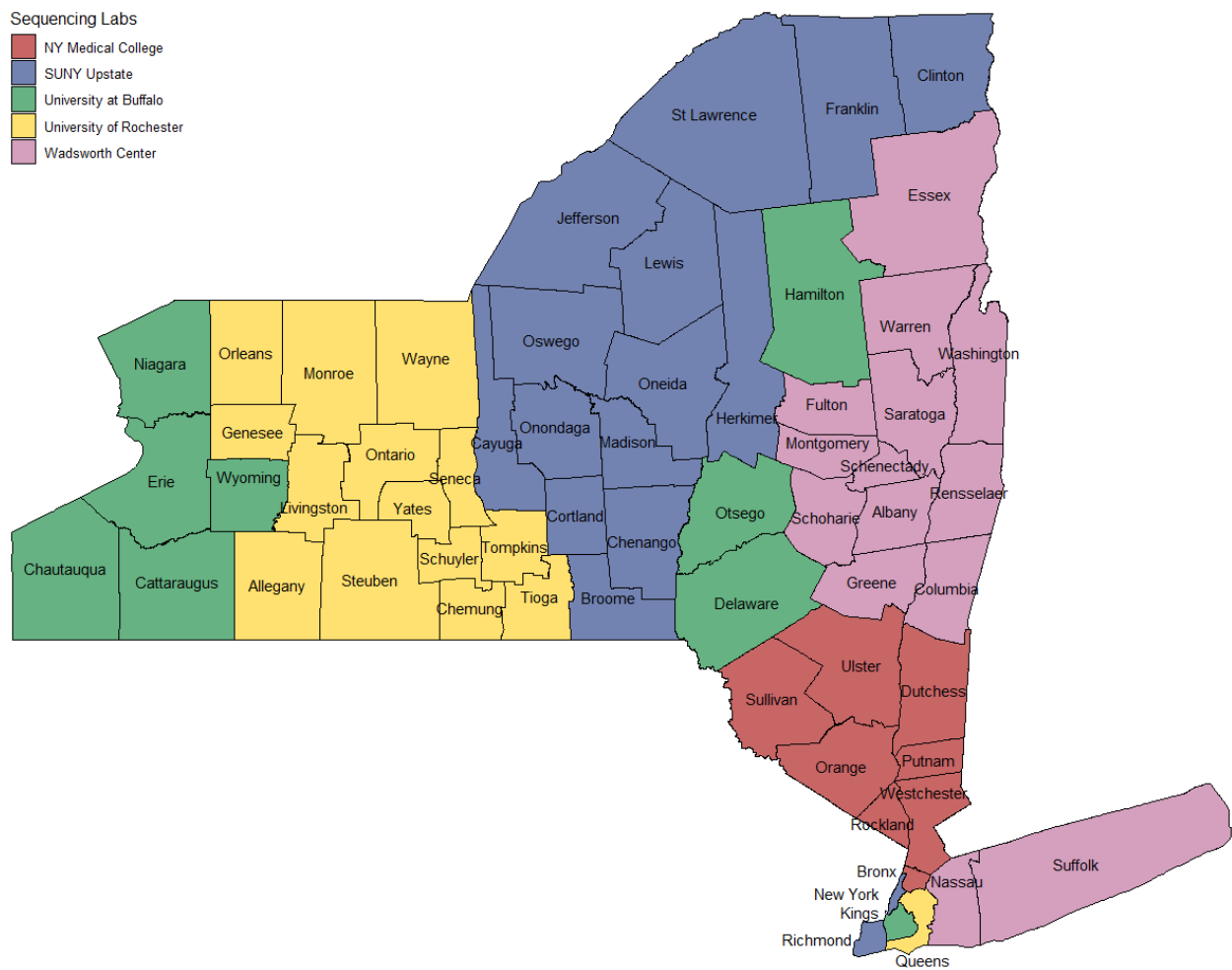
- FedEx account: 468123622
- Please note "ECONYS" on the shipping label
- Please contact us at 518-474-4177 if you need to ship by UPS

Facilities should **submit samples** to the sequencing facility in the NYS consortium **according to the county in which they are located**, as shown in the **table below**.

A map of the county allocation is also shown for ease of reference.

Sequencing Center	Contact Details	Counties	Shipping Address	Submission Instructions
Wadsworth Center	<p>Kirsten St. George, PhD, FAAM  <a href="mailto:Kirsten.St.George@health.ny.gov">Kirsten.St.George@health.ny.gov</a>  (518) 402 2709</p> <p>Alexis Russell, MPH  <a href="mailto:Alexis.Russell@health.ny.gov">Alexis.Russell@health.ny.gov</a>  (518) 408 7723</p>	Albany Columbia Essex Fulton Greene Montgomery Nassau Rensselaer Saratoga Schenectady Schoharie Suffolk Warren Washington	Laboratory of Viral Diseases Wadsworth Center, DAI 120 New Scotland Avenue Albany, NY 12208	<p>For facilities with Health Commerce System access, upload electronic submissions at: <a href="#">NYSDOH Health Commerce System Website</a>.</p> <p>Questions on obtaining access can be directed to Liz Lewis at 518-474-4177. Alternatively, submit paper requisition forms – one per patient – available at: <a href="#">Wadsworth IDR form</a></p> <p>Request SARS-CoV-2 Whole Genome Sequencing. Include a copy of either the electronic manifest or the hard copy IDR form in the box with the samples.</p>
SUNY Upstate	<p>Dr. Frank Middleton  <a href="mailto:middleff@upstate.edu">middleff@upstate.edu</a>  315-464-7721 (direct line)</p> <p>James Boyer  <a href="mailto:boyerja@upstate.edu">boyerja@upstate.edu</a>  315-464-7729</p>	Broome Cayuga Chenango Clinton Cortland Franklin Herkimer Jefferson Lewis Madison New York Oneida Onondaga Oswego Richmond St. Lawrence	Dr. Frank Middleton SUNY Upstate Medical University 505 Irving Avenue, 3733 IHP Syracuse, NY 13210	<p>Sample information can be entered at the following secure website link: <a href="https://redcap.link/sunycovid">redcap.link/sunycovid</a></p>
University of Rochester	<p>Dwight Hardy, PhD  <a href="mailto:dwight_hardy@urmc.rochester.edu">dwight_hardy@urmc.rochester.edu</a></p> <p>Andrew Cameron, PhD  <a href="mailto:andrew_cameron@urmc.rochester.edu">andrew_cameron@urmc.rochester.edu</a></p>	Allegany Chemung Genesee Livingston Monroe Ontario Orleans Queens Schuyler Seneca Steuben Tioga Tompkins Wayne Yates	UR Medicine Central Lab ATTN: Dwight Hardy, PhD Microbiology Lab 211 Bailey Road West Henrietta, NY 14586	<p>Please see the link below to requisition the “enhanced surveillance” for COVID-19.</p> <p><a href="#">Enhanced COVID-19 New York State Surveillance Requisition</a></p>
University at Buffalo	<p>Jennifer A. Surtees, PhD</p> <p>Office phone: (716) 829-6083  Cell phone: (716) 392-7153</p>	Cattaraugus Chautauqua Delaware Erie	955 Main Street - Rm 4215 Jacobs School	<p>Completed submission forms  (<a href="https://buffalo.box.com/s/k">https://buffalo.box.com/s/k</a>)</p>

	<p>Genomics core lab number: (716) 881-7514</p> <p>Don Yergeau Office phone: (716) 645-9195 Cell phone: (901) 275-2007</p>	<p>Hamilton Kings Niagara Otsego Wyoming</p>	<p>of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences University at Buffalo Buffalo, NY 14203</p>	<p><a href="https://www.buffalo.edu/content/www/genomeenvironmentmicrobiome/research/university-at-buffalo-covid-sequencing-registration/jcr_content/module/file.res/UB_COVID_Sequence_Reg.pdf">awf77o8eip7hn7fmcv0muzgex8twg9</a> OR <a href="https://www.buffalo.edu/content/www/genomeenvironmentmicrobiome/research/university-at-buffalo-covid-sequencing-registration/jcr_content/module/file.res/UB_COVID_Sequence_Reg.pdf">https://www.buffalo.edu/content/www/genomeenvironmentmicrobiome/research/university-at-buffalo-covid-sequencing-registration/jcr_content/module/file.res/UB_COVID_Sequence_Reg.pdf</a> can be uploaded to the following secure link: <a href="https://buffalo.app.box.com/f/0582f0e89bda47b6883c994bbe262e91">https://buffalo.app.box.com/f/0582f0e89bda47b6883c994bbe262e91</a></p>
<p>New York Medical College</p>	<p>Salomon Amar, DDS, PhD Office Phone: 914-594-4575 Email: <a href="mailto:Salomon.Amar@nymc.edu">Salomon.Amar@nymc.edu</a></p> <p>Brahmaraju Mopidevi, PhD Office Phone: 914-594-3928 Email: <a href="mailto:bmopidev@nymc.edu">bmopidev@nymc.edu</a></p>	<p>Bronx Dutchess Orange Putnam Rockland Sullivan Ulster Westchester</p>	<p>15 Dana Road Central Receiving Room-409 Basic Science Building New York Medical College Valhalla, New York 10595</p>	<p>Sample information can be entered at the following secure website. <a href="https://nymc.login.redcapcloud.com/survey.jsp?code=XPhVVbEATHPSpovC">https://nymc.login.redcapcloud.com/survey.jsp?code=XPhVVbEATHPSpovC</a></p>



We extend our sincere thanks to facilities that have submitted samples in the past to the NYS COVID sequencing pipeline and those that continue to do so. As before, **this testing is for surveillance purposes and the sequencing methods are not approved for clinical testing. Therefore, individual patient results cannot be returned.** However, the analysis and county distribution of COVID sequencing results for NYS samples are publicly available at the following web site: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-variant-data>

Additionally, the analysis of SARS-CoV-2 positive wastewater samples for NYS, including sequence analysis and geographic distribution, can also be viewed at the following web site: <http://covid.nywastewatcher.io/>

Please direct any questions regarding this initiative to [COVIDstrain@health.ny.gov](mailto:COVIDstrain@health.ny.gov)