



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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**DOH PARTNERS WITH LOCAL LABORATORIES FOR PANDEMIC
PREPAREDNESS**

State's flu testing capacity enhanced

HONOLULU -- The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) has developed an innovative partnership with local clinical laboratories to increase and improve influenza testing in the state. Three private laboratories – diagnostic laboratories from Kaiser Permanente, Clinical Laboratories of Hawai'i, and Diagnostic Laboratory Services – have established advanced molecular testing for influenza to improve patient care, as well as increase the state's surveillance and response capacity.

“With the help of these three private laboratories Hawai'i is another step closer to preparing for an influenza pandemic or severe flu season,” said Health Director Chiyome Fukino, M.D. “The important work of these private labs will help better identify, quickly verify, and greatly assist in the monitoring of flu cases each year.”

This year, DOH offered up to \$150,000 in federally funded grants and technical assistance to local laboratories to buy equipment and supplies to establish advanced molecular testing for influenza. Diagnostic laboratories from Kaiser Permanente, Clinical Laboratories of Hawai'i, and Diagnostic Laboratory Services agreed to establish testing services, and also to warehouse and rotate supplies over the next five years to test at least 1,000 patients at any time.

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“These new tests are extremely important because they give doctors the ability to detect and identify the flu virus in its early stages to better manage their patients with flu-like illness,” said Dr. Glenn Furuya, Clinical Laboratories of Hawai‘i medical director. “With new treatments for flu becoming available, earlier and more accurate test results provide invaluable information for physicians.”

“As champions for health in Hawai‘i, Kaiser Permanente Regional Laboratories is excited to partner with the Department of Health in its efforts to enhance influenza surveillance and pandemic preparedness,” Dr. Stacey Honda, medical director of laboratories for Kaiser Permanente said. “We are pleased to be given the opportunity to help ensure the well being of our members and all of Hawai‘i’s people.”

Ed Hope, Diagnostic Laboratory Services vice president for marketing said, “Diagnostic Laboratory Services is excited at the opportunity to work with the Department of Health, and has for a long time supported a closer professional relationship between the public and private sector.”

“In a matter of months, Hawai‘i has more than doubled its flu testing capacity from just two laboratories in the state that could provide molecular testing to now five labs,” said Dr. Chris Whelen, DOH State Laboratories Division chief. “These private laboratories are helping to maximize our state’s ability to perform flu testing and efficiently use and rotate test supply stockpiles which expire after about one year.”

Testing accuracy will improve overall. Previously, definitive testing for influenza in Hawai‘i was only available at the DOH State Laboratory and Tripler Army Medical Center. Local testing available to doctors was limited to the rapid antigen test, a quick and widely used test that is significantly less accurate. While antigen tests may still be used, the availability of new molecular testing will increase the accuracy of results at critical times of the year.

“Rapid antigen tests will remain important screens during the peak of the season or in remote locations, but they are not good enough to rule out influenza for much of the year,” said Dr. Whelen. “Some of the critical surveillance times are at the beginning and end of the season when infection rates may be lower and difficult to monitor.”

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The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that each year in the U.S. more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and about 36,000 people die from flu. Influenza antiviral medication can effectively reduce flu symptoms and shorten the time you are sick if taken within 48 hours of becoming sick.

The DOH advises the best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

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