

Dear Doctor,

We are inviting you to join our network of Alberta Sentinel practitioners, who help diagnose and understand the incidence of viral disease in the community of Alberta. Doing this helps public health understanding, but also enables you to help your patients better. Are you intrigued by viral disease? Do you want to know more than: “it’s likely a virus, you will most likely recover.”

The Tarrant program has been running for over 20 years, changing as viral testing improves, as viral epidemics pass through, and the scientific questions about epidemiology and vaccine effectiveness change. We have contributed to world understanding of influenza vaccine effectiveness, and now are working on COVID vaccine effectiveness.

What do you need to do?

Sentinels ask each patient who presents with a likely vital respiratory infection to participate. If they consent, you complete a special lab form which adds extra information about their immunization status, then take a nasopharyngeal swab. You will get the full results of a multiplex viral screening test. Even in epidemic periods when viral testing is restricted for most physicians because of lab overload, sentinel practitioners still get these full analyses.

What do we do for you?

You get full details of the viral analysis for each patient. We pay you \$30 for each sample you take with full details (In addition to the Medicare fees you normally receive). We send you regular information about what is happening in Alberta, and Canada.

You also get the satisfaction of participating in research that measures each year’s influenza vaccine effectiveness, and hopefully COVID vaccine effectiveness. As the respiratory illness environment changes, we change our research agenda, to inform decisions about viral epidemiology, public health, and choices of vaccines.

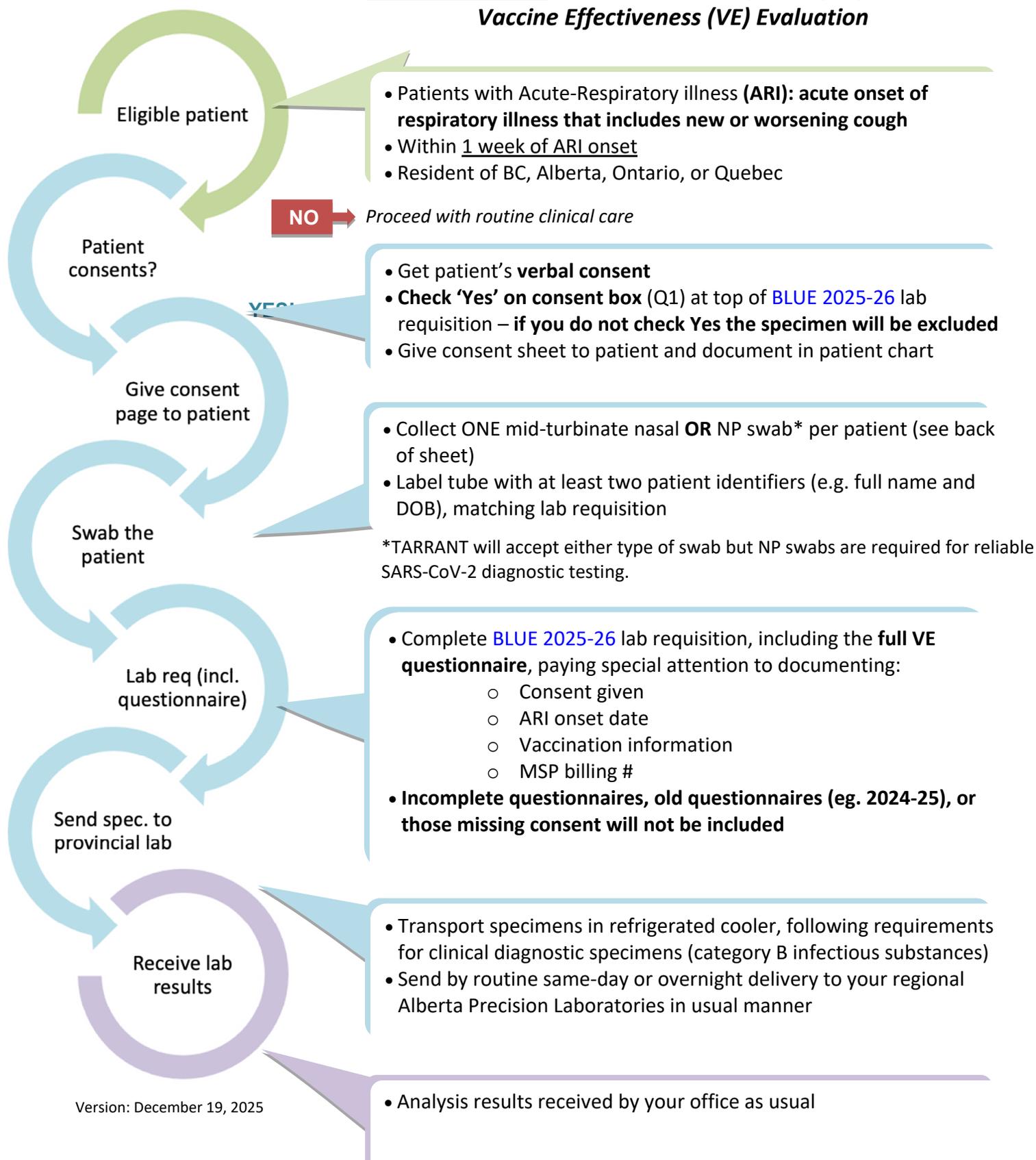
How do I start?

We are looking for physicians who have a community practice, seeing patients who attend your office. If you see some patients in the emergency room, that is good too, but not patients who are in hospital, nursing homes or other institutions, since other systems sample these groups.

We cordially invite you to join us in our research program. Please reach out to us at: tarrant@ucalgary.ca or call 403-2202750, or fax back the form overleaf with your details. We will get back to you and enroll you in the program.

Thank you. The Tarrant Team

Steps at a Glance: 2025-26 SPSN Respiratory Infection and Vaccine Effectiveness (VE) Evaluation



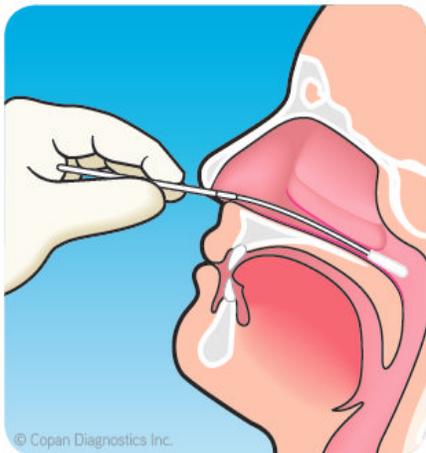
Tips for Specimen Collection

NP swabs are preferred for SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis and may give higher yield also for influenza virus, but mid-turbinate nasal swabs are more comfortable for the patient and for surveillance purposes are considered adequate based on NAAT/PCR for influenza virus. Apply caution in patients with bleeding diatheses from whom swabs may not be indicated.

When obtaining a specimen from a patient with ARI, follow the recommended Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures and personal protective equipment (PPE) including medical masks, eye protection, and gloves. If the point of care risk assessment deems a higher level of protection (e.g. N95 respirator) is needed, the testing should only proceed as clinically warranted and with the necessary enhanced protection as indicated. Other precautions may include:

- Minimizing the time spent obtaining the specimen.
- Standing to the side of the patient to avoid droplets from induced cough or sneeze.
- Request that patients with copious discharge gently clean their nose by washing or with tissue.

Mid-turbinate Nasal Swab: Incline the patient's head as required and insert the swab into the nostril approximately 2 cm (upto 1 inch) along the nasal septum (the centre of the nose). Rub the swab vigorously but gently along the lining of the septum several times to obtain cells. *It is essential that the nasal passage is swabbed firmly to collect cells rich in virus.*



NP Swab: Tilt the patient's head back slightly and insert the swab approximately 6 cm with a slow, steady motion along the floor of the nose (straight back, not up the nose) until the posterior nasopharynx has been reached and a point of resistance is met (2/3 of the distance from nostrils to external opening of ear). Rotate the swab several times to obtain cells containing virus and then withdraw the swab.

For a brief (40 sec) video demonstration of how to properly collect an NP swab, consult the following website:
youtu.be/DVJNWefmHjE

Place the swab into the accompanying vial of transport media and tighten the lid securely. **Label** the container with the patient's **full name** and **date of birth**. Refrigerate the specimen at 4°C immediately following collection.

To request more kits, contact us at:

TARRANT Viral Watch

Tel: (403) 220-2750; Fax: (403) 210-9337

Email: tarrant@ucalgary.ca

2025-26 Respiratory Infection and Vaccine Effectiveness Evaluation

Patient Copy

Our office is participating in a cross-Canada project to measure how well immunization against respiratory viruses such as influenza, COVID-19, or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) work each year. Because you have a respiratory illness, we are offering you a swab test to find out whether you have influenza, COVID-19, RSV or another respiratory infection.

We invite you to provide answers to some extra questions on your symptoms and when they began; influenza, COVID-19 and RSV immunization history; and whether you have a chronic health condition.

With this information and the usual lab testing data public health experts can measure how well immunizations against these respiratory infections work. Results also help us to monitor which infections are causing illness in the community.

If you participate, your swab will be tested for respiratory infections at our provincial and national laboratories and results will be returned this clinic. We may check details of your respiratory immunizations with the provincial immunization registry. Your results and answers will go to the Research office, added to data from other participating provinces then analysed at the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) or another partner public health agency in Canada.

While analyzing the combined data, your information will only be linked to your test results by a specimen code. For your privacy no identifying information goes outside Alberta. We may also share data and respiratory test results outside of Canada. The research office keeps your record securely for 7 years, then they are destroyed.

Findings from the combined data may be presented at conferences, published in research journals and/or submitted to public databases to help with worldwide respiratory infection and vaccine monitoring. For that purpose, we may also share data and respiratory viruses with other public health agencies and labs.

However, under Alberta law, if your swab tests positive for a reportable infection such as influenza or COVID-19 virus, the laboratory must identify you to Alberta public health authorities for possible follow-up.

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you do not have to give a reason, and it will not affect the care we provide. If you decide to withdraw from the study, notify us and your data will be deleted. Your swab can still be tested as part of your routine clinical care. Agreeing to take part this study does not change your legal rights nor my legal and professional responsibilities to continue high quality care for you.

You can contact the Tarrant research office, and if you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Conjoint health Research Ethics Board. Their details are below.

Would you like to know more? Do you have any questions?

Is it OK to collect a swab to test for influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory infections and include your test information, responses to these questions and vaccine registry information to assess how well this season's immunizations work?

Ethics ID REB15-0587

Sentinel Network to Monitor Influenza and COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness
Principal Investigator Prof. J Dickinson Department of Family Medicine. Ph: 403 220 2750
Chair, Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board Ph: 403 220 7990 Email: chreb@ucalgary.ca



Join the Tarrant Viral Watch Program



About the Tarrant Viral Watch Program

-  TVWP monitors respiratory infections circulating in the community
-  Uses primary care sentinels (physicians and nurse practitioners) for data collection
-  TVWP sentinels have enabled Alberta to become a major contributor to national influenza surveillance and vaccine effectiveness research



How much are sentinels compensated?



Sentinels are compensated \$30 for each specimen submitted with correct documentation.

Where can I sign up or find out more?

-  Visit the TARRANT website: <https://cumming.ucalgary.ca/research/alberta-recording-network/home-tarrant>
-  Use the QR code (on the right)
-  Email TARRANT: tarrant@ucalgary.ca

