

Houston Health Department Laboratory Guidelines for Ebola Specimen Submission

May 26, 2026

On May 22, 2026, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued the [Interim Guidance: Public Health Assessment and Management of Travelers Arriving from the Affected Countries during the 2026 Ebola Outbreak](#). Houston Health Department (HHD) Laboratory can perform testing for Bundibugyo virus disease (BVD) if testing is approved following consultation with CDC.

1. Clinical laboratories can safely perform common diagnostic testing by following [Standard Precautions for All Patient Care](#) which includes the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard ([29 CFR 1910.1030](#)). Refer to [Guidance on Performing Routine Diagnostic Testing for Patients with Suspected VHFs or Other High-Consequence Disease](#), which also includes information on personal protective equipment (PPE) during specimen collection and laboratory testing.
2. **Clinicians with concerns about an Ebola virus infection during the differential diagnosis of their patient's illness should contact their [jurisdictional health department](#) immediately.**
3. A consultation call with CDC will be coordinated by the jurisdictional health department after initial case investigation to assess the risk of a viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF) or other high-consequence disease based on the clinical presentation and epidemiologic risk factors to determine if VHF or other high-consequence disease testing is needed, and what other causes of illness should be considered (e.g., malaria).
4. Jurisdictional health department should involve HHD Laboratory Response Network (LRN) testing laboratory when consulting with CDC on a suspected Person Under Investigation. Earlier awareness of a possible case is preferred so LRN laboratory can be prepared in case testing is approved.

HHD Laboratory contacts to be included in CDC consultation call and case awareness are:

- Ricardo Quijano: Ricardo.Quijano@houstontx.gov; 713-471-6376 (Cell)
 - Dr. Dona Wijetunge: Dona.Wijetunge@houstontx.gov
 - Dr. Meilan Bielby: Meilan.Bielby@houstontx.gov
5. **Once testing is approved and a case number is issued by CDC, the submitter can start making arrangements with HHD LRN laboratory for specimen submission:**
 - Supervisor Ricardo Quijano: Office: 832-393-3926; Cell: 713-471-6376
 - HHD LRN Laboratory phone number: 832-393-3959

6. **Instructions for sample collection and submission:**
 - A. Collect **two** tubes of whole blood in a plastic tube preserved with EDTA.
 - B. Do **NOT** use glass containers or heparinized tubes.
 - C. **Label each tube with patient's name, date of birth, test requested, and date of collection.**
 - D. For each tube, collect at least 4 mL whole blood for an adult and at least 1 mL whole blood for a child.
 - E. Do **NOT** separate and remove serum or plasma from the primary collection container.
 - F. Store both specimens at 2-8°C before shipping.
 - G. **Fill out HHD Laboratory "Special Pathogen Testing" test request form to be provided by HHD LRN Laboratory once testing is approved by CDC. Remember to fill out "CDC Assigned Testing Approval Case #".**
 - H. **Specimens should be packaged and transported to the HHD Laboratory as a Suspect Category A Infectious Substance by certified personnel present at the submitting entity.** Refer to [VHF Clinical Specimen Packaging and Shipping](#) and package specimens following the triple packaging system as shown in the link, which consists of (1) a primary container (a sealable specimen container) wrapped with absorbent material, (2) a secondary container (watertight, leak-proof), and (3) an outer shipping package that meet Category A shipping requirements.
 - I. **Do NOT** package suspected Ebola specimens as Category B infectious substances as you would for routine diagnostic specimens. It is not safe.
 - J. Transport both specimens to HHD Laboratory cold (2 - 8°C):
 - i. Within the outer ice chest (e.g., styrofoam), place sufficient ice packs to surround the sealed secondary packaging on all sides and provide further insulation to maintain temperature of 2-8°C during transit.
 - ii. Deliver/Ship to:
ATTN: Ricardo Quijano (Phone: 832-393-3926)
Molecular Diagnostics/LRN Laboratory
2250 Holcombe Blvd; Houston TX 77030
 - K. If the specimen test result is negative and the patient's symptoms have been present for less than 72 hours, a second specimen should be collected 72 hours after symptom onset in consultation with public health officials.
7. Any presumptive positive test result for an Ebola or other high-consequence diseases must be confirmed by CDC to inform public health decisions.