

1 **Detection of novel influenza viruses through community and healthcare testing: Implications
2 for surveillance efforts in the United States**

3 Sinead E. Morris^{1,2,*}, Matthew Gilmer^{1,2}, Ryan Threlkel¹, Lynnette Brammer¹, Alicia P. Budd¹, A. Danielle
4 Iuliano¹, Carrie Reed¹, Matthew Biggerstaff¹

5 *¹Influenza Division, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA*

6 *²Goldbelt Professional Services, Chesapeake, VA*

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8 *Corresponding author: run7@cdc.gov

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10 **Short title:** Healthcare testing of novel influenza viruses

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12 **Disclaimer:** The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily
13 represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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15 **Data Availability Statement:** All model inputs and code needed to perform the analysis are available at
16 <https://github.com/CDCgov/novel-flu-detection>. Data were used solely to inform model inputs and were
17 the result of secondary analyses; the original sources are cited in the text.

18

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31 **Abstract**

32 **Background** Novel influenza viruses pose a potential pandemic risk and rapid detection of infections in
33 humans is critical to characterizing the virus and facilitating the implementation of public health
34 response measures.

35 **Methods** We use a probabilistic framework to estimate the likelihood that novel influenza virus cases
36 would be detected through testing in different community and healthcare settings (urgent care,
37 emergency department, hospital, and intensive care unit (ICU)) while at low frequencies in the United
38 States. Parameters were informed by data on seasonal influenza virus activity and existing testing
39 practices.

40 **Results** In a baseline scenario reflecting the presence of 100 novel virus infections with similar severity
41 to seasonal influenza viruses, the median probability of detecting at least one infection per month was
42 highest in urgent care settings (72%) and when community testing was conducted at random among the
43 general population (77%). However, urgent care testing was over 15 times more efficient (estimated as
44 the number of cases detected per 100,000 tests) due to the larger number of tests required for
45 community testing. In scenarios that assumed increased clinical severity of novel virus infection, median
46 detection probabilities increased across all healthcare settings, particularly in hospitals and ICUs (up to
47 100%) where testing also became more efficient.

48 **Conclusions** Our results suggest that novel influenza virus circulation is likely to be detected through
49 existing healthcare surveillance, with the most efficient testing setting impacted by the disease severity
50 profile. These analyses can help inform future testing strategies to maximize the likelihood of novel
51 influenza detection.

52 **Keywords:** influenza; H5N1; novel virus; detection; healthcare testing

53

54 **Introduction**

55 Novel influenza viruses are different from the seasonal influenza viruses currently circulating in humans
56 (A/H3N2, A/H1N1, and B/Victoria). Human infections with novel influenza viruses are generally rare and
57 isolated events that occur through exposure to infected animals (such as livestock) during recreational
58 or occupational activities. At the time of writing (10 May 2024), widespread avian influenza A(H5N1)
59 virus outbreaks occurring among wild and commercial birds since January 2022 have been associated
60 with just two detected human cases of H5N1 in the United States: one individual who was exposed to
61 infected poultry and one who was exposed to infected dairy cattle [1, 2]. The H5N1 viruses associated
62 with these outbreaks do not easily bind to receptors in the human upper respiratory tract and the risk to
63 the general public is currently low [1]. However, a novel influenza virus that transmits efficiently
64 between humans could pose a pandemic risk. Rapid detection of human infection with a novel influenza
65 virus is critical to characterizing the virus causing the infection and facilitating a rapid public health
66 response [3].

67 Testing is particularly important to distinguish novel influenza virus infection from seasonal influenza or
68 other respiratory virus infections with similar symptom profiles [4]. Although active monitoring and
69 testing of individuals with exposure to infected animals can identify new spillover infections [2], such

70 measures are not designed to detect cases in the wider community following sustained human-to-
71 human transmission. Public health surveillance systems must be equipped to detect novel influenza
72 cases through testing in the community or in healthcare settings where infected individuals might seek
73 care.

74 We use a probabilistic framework to estimate the likelihood of detection of novel influenza virus cases
75 once sustained human-to-human transmission is occurring at low frequencies within the United States
76 (i.e., 1,000 total cases or less). We consider testing of individuals presenting to different healthcare
77 settings with no known previous exposure to infected animals or humans and use information on testing
78 for seasonal influenza viruses to develop assumptions about plausible testing probabilities. Our findings
79 can help inform testing strategies to improve detection of novel influenza virus cases occurring at low
80 frequencies.

81

82 **Methods**

83 **Model**

84 We adapted an existing framework to estimate detection probabilities for a novel influenza virus in the
85 United States [5]. For a given case of novel influenza virus infection, the probability of detection in a
86 particular healthcare setting can be expressed as

87
$$p_{detect} = P(test | case) \times p_d \times t_{sn} \times p_f,$$

88 where $P(test | case)$ is the probability that someone is tested in that setting given that they are a case;
89 p_d is the probability that testing occurs while virus is still detectable; t_{sn} is the test sensitivity; and p_f is
90 the probability a positive test is forwarded to a public health laboratory for further testing. Most
91 commercial assays currently used for human influenza virus testing cannot distinguish novel influenza A
92 viruses from seasonal influenza A viruses. Thus, further testing at a public health laboratory is required
93 for a positive specimen to be identified as a novel virus (until tests specific for that virus become more
94 widely available). We initially assumed 50% of positive specimens are forwarded (i.e., $p_f = 50\%$). This
95 was informed by the average percentage of influenza A hospitalizations that were subtyped between
96 2010–2019 [6]. However, we considered a range of forwarding levels (25, 50%, 75% and 100%) in
97 sensitivity analyses. All specimens forwarded for further testing were assumed to be correctly identified
98 as a novel influenza virus.

99 The per case probability of being tested is the combined probability that a case will develop symptoms
100 (p_{symp}), seek care for those symptoms in a particular healthcare setting (p_{seek}), and be tested in that
101 setting (p_{test}), i.e.,

102
$$P(test | case) = p_{symp} \times p_{seek} \times p_{test}.$$

103 For a certain incidence of novel cases each month, I , in a population of size N (where I is the fraction of
104 the population infected with the novel influenza virus), we estimate the probability of detecting at least
105 one novel case as 1 - the probability of detecting no cases among the entire population, or

106
$$1 - (1 - I \times p_{detect})^N$$

107 (see the supporting information for further details). The expected number of clinical tests used per
108 month, $E(T)$, is the combined number of tests conducted among cases and non-cases. Non-cases
109 represent individuals presenting at healthcare settings with respiratory illness symptoms that are not
110 due to novel influenza virus infection. The expected number of tests can be expressed as

111
$$E(T) = I \times N \times P(\text{test} | \text{case}) + (1 - I) \times N \times P(\text{test} | \text{not case}),$$

112 where $P(\text{test} | \text{not case})$ is the probability that someone without novel influenza virus infection is
113 tested. The latter quantity is estimated as the background rate of presentation with respiratory illness
114 symptoms to a given healthcare setting among the general population (b_{seek}) multiplied by the
115 probability of being tested in that setting (p_{test}). To compare testing efficiency in different settings we
116 estimated the expected number of detected cases per 100,000 clinical tests conducted as
117
$$(I \times N \times p_{\text{detect}} / E(T)) \times 100,000.$$

118 Finally, we considered random testing in the general community as a supplemental strategy that could
119 be deployed in addition to healthcare testing. Given that community testing does not depend on
120 symptom presentation or care-seeking behavior, $P(\text{test} | \text{case})$ was simply the frequency of community
121 tests conducted per month and the expected number of tests was $N \times P(\text{test} | \text{case})$. Similarly, p_d was
122 the approximate time (in months) that virus would remain detectable and was parameterized to capture
123 individual variation in virus shedding dynamics. Since community testing would be initiated to seek out
124 novel influenza virus infection, we did not adjust for specimen forwarding (i.e., we assumed all
125 specimens would be tested to distinguish novel influenza virus from seasonal influenza viruses).

126 For each healthcare and community setting, we drew 10,000 parameter combinations from data-
127 informed distributions (outlined below) and calculated the quantities described above. All analyses and
128 visualizations were generated in R version 4.0.3 using the `data.table`, `truncnorm`, `here`,
129 `scales`, `patchwork`, `colorspace` and `tidyverse` packages [7-14].

130 **Healthcare settings and model parameterization**

131 We considered three distinct healthcare settings to reflect different care-seeking behaviors and testing
132 practices: (i) outpatient urgent care and emergency departments (UC/ED); (ii) inpatient hospital settings;
133 and (iii) intensive care units (ICU). Each setting was assumed independent such that a person presenting
134 to both (for example, a hospital admission followed by a subsequent ICU admission) could be tested in
135 both, according to the corresponding testing probabilities. Data were collated from various existing
136 influenza surveillance platforms to inform parameters for each setting (Table 1). We defined $N = 330$
137 million to approximate the U.S. population [15] and considered incidence values that corresponded to
138 100 and 1,000 total novel influenza cases.

139 **Table 1. Baseline care-seeking and testing parameters.** Surveillance platforms are Flu Near You (FNY), Outbreaks
140 Near Me (ONM), VISION Vaccine Effectiveness Network, FluSurv-Net, and IBM MarketScan® Commercial Claims
141 and Encounters Database (MarketScan) [16-19]. Further details of each platform are provided in the supporting
142 information.

Parameter	Assumed distribution	Source and available timeframe (if applicable)
Proportion of novel cases developing symptoms, p_{symp}	Uniform with range: 40–80%	[20]

Care-seeking and presentation of novel symptomatic cases at specific sites, p_{seek} :	Uniform with range: 10–20% of symptomatic cases	FNY, ONM: 2018–2023
UC / ED		
Hospital	1–2% of symptomatic cases	CDC burden estimates: 2010–2021 [21]
ICU	15–20% of hospitalizations	VISION: 2020–2021; FluSurv-Net: 2022–2023
Testing of individuals with ARI, p_{test} :	Truncated normal with mean / SD / range: 50% / 10% / 10–90% 53% / 10% / 20–95% 46% / 10% / 1–95%	VISION: December 2021–May 2022
UC / ED		
Hospital		
ICU		
Community testing as a proportion of the general population, regardless of symptoms	3–6% of general population per month	Assumption following [22]
Tests that occur while virus is detectable, p_d	Uniform with range: 50–85%	Proportion seeking care ≤7 days after symptom onset [23]
Healthcare settings	25–50%	Proportion of month that virus is detectable [24]
Community settings		
Test sensitivity, t_{sn}	Uniform with range 80–100%	[25]
Proportion of positive specimens that are forwarded to a public health laboratory, p_f	50%	Assumption following [6]
Background occurrence in the general population, b_{seek} , of:	Uniform with range: 0.6–6%	
ILI*	0.03–0.1%	FNY, ONM: 2019, 2022
Hospital ARI admissions	0.02–0.03%	MarketScan: 2015–2021
ICU ARI admissions		MarketScan: 2015–2021

143 Abbreviations: UC = urgent care; ED = emergency department; ICU = intensive care unit; ILI = influenza-like-illness; ARI = acute
144 respiratory illness; SD = standard deviation.

145 *Background ILI occurrence is multiplied by care-seeking probabilities in urgent care or emergency departments (p_{seek}) to
146 estimate the rate of presentation to urgent care or emergency departments with influenza symptoms in the general
147 population. We omitted data from 2020 and 2021 due to atypically low levels of respiratory virus circulation.

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149 Our baseline scenario reflected a novel influenza virus with similar severity to seasonal influenza.
150 However, we also considered increased severity scenarios that ranged from severity that was similar to
151 COVID-19, to the severity of recent H5N1 virus infections in humans (Table 2). For these scenarios, we
152 assumed similar or increased probabilities of developing symptoms and seeking care in each healthcare
153 setting, while ensuring that the combined percentages did not exceed 100%. We initially assumed
154 testing probabilities were fixed (Table 1) but explored alternative scenarios with increased testing (p_{test}
155 mean = 90%) to compare the effect of enhanced surveillance across healthcare settings.

156 **Table 2. Scenarios for increased symptom severity.** All parameters are assumed to follow a Uniform distribution
157 with the reported range.

Scenario	Symptomatic	UC / ED [†]	Hospital	ICU [§]	Source(s)
Baseline	40–80%	10–20%	1–2% CHR [†]	15–20%	[20, 21]
COVID-like	40–80%	10–20%	1–2% IHR [‡]	20–30%	[22, 26]
Intermediate 1	25% > baseline*	25% > baseline*	4.5–5.5% IHR [‡]	30–40%	[22]

Intermediate 2	50% > baseline*	50% > baseline*	9.5–10.5% IHR [‡]	45–55%	[22]
Recent H5-like	50% > baseline*	50% > baseline*	60–70% IHR [‡]	75–85%	[1]

158 Abbreviations: UC = urgent care; ED = emergency department; ICU = intensive care unit; CHR = case-hospitalization ratio; IHR =
159 infection-hospitalization ratio.

160 *Up to a maximum of 100%.

161 [†]Expressed as a percentage of symptomatic individuals.

162 [‡]Expressed as a percentage of infected individuals.

163 [§]Expressed as a percentage of hospitalizations.

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165 We also considered scenarios in which testing practices changed according to seasonal influenza activity.
166 For example, clinicians may be less likely to test for influenza viruses during summer months when
167 background respiratory virus activity is low. To explore this, we first defined distinct probability
168 distributions for the background rates of presentation to each healthcare setting, b_{seek} , during peak
169 (November – February) and off-peak (May – August) time periods (Table 3). We then simulated the
170 model for each time period and healthcare setting, assuming the care-seeking behavior of novel
171 influenza cases did not change but that testing in off-peak periods was either equal to, or 50% of, testing
172 in peak periods.

173 **Table 3. Baseline occurrence of ILI or ARI symptoms partitioned by peak vs off-peak activity.**

Parameter	Range of uniform distribution	Period	Source and available timeframe
Occurrence of: ILI [*]	1.0–6.0% 0.6–2.5%	Peak Off-peak	FNY, ONM: 2019, 2022
Hospital ARI admission	0.04–0.10% of general population 0.03–0.09% of general population	Peak Off-peak	MarketScan: 2015–2021
ICU ARI admission	0.014–0.035% of general population 0.010–0.030% of general population	Peak Off-peak	MarketScan: 2015–2021

174 Abbreviations: ILI = influenza-like-illness; ARI = acute respiratory illness; ICU = intensive care unit; FNY = Flu Near You; ONM =
175 Outbreaks Near Me.

176 *Background ILI occurrence is multiplied by care-seeking probabilities in urgent care or emergency departments (p_{seek}) to
177 estimate the rate of presentation to urgent care or emergency departments in the general population. We omitted data from
178 2020 and 2021 due to atypically low levels of respiratory virus circulation.

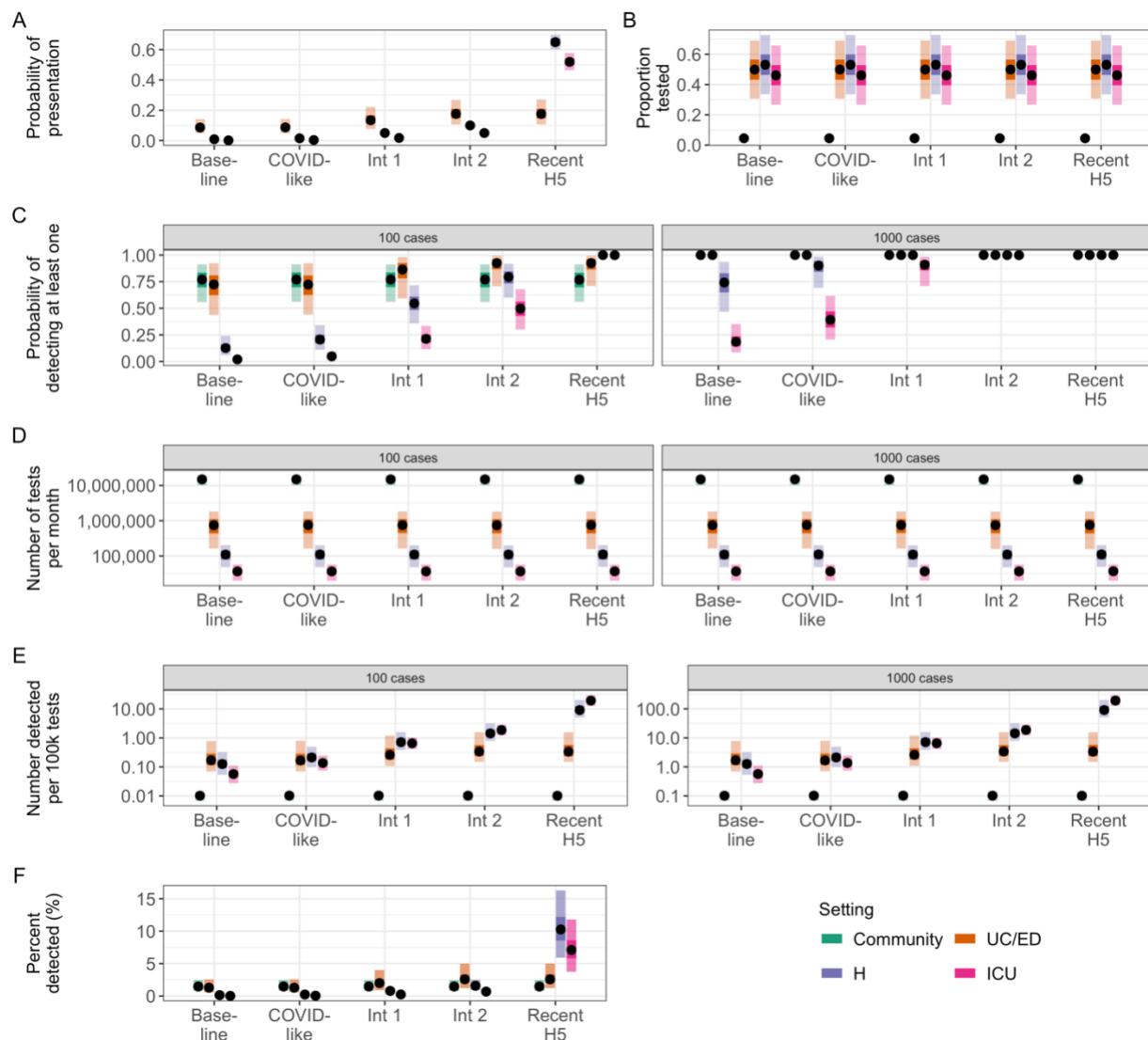
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180 **Results**

181 We first simulated the model with baseline severity assumptions and no distinction between peak and
182 off-peak time periods. At the lowest incidence (100 novel cases in the population), the median
183 probability of detecting at least one case was highest in community and UC/ED settings, at 77% (95th
184 percentile: 56–91%) and 72% (44–92%), respectively (Figure 1C; Baseline scenario). In comparison,
185 median detection probabilities in hospital and ICU settings were less than 15%. The probability of
186 detection increased across all settings when there were 1,000 assumed novel cases in the population, to
187 100% (100–100%) in UC/EDs and the community, 74% (47–94%) in hospitals, and 19% (9–35%) in ICUs.
188 Testing in UC/ED settings was always most efficient and detected more cases per 100,000 tests than
189 other settings (Figure 1E). Notably, community testing was least efficient due to the greater number of
190 tests required (more than 10 million per month; Figure 1D), and no setting detected more than 3% of all

191 novel cases under our assumptions (Figure 1F). Increasing the percentage of influenza positive
 192 specimens forwarded to public health laboratories to 75% or 100% increased detection probabilities and
 193 test efficiency across all healthcare settings (Figure S1). For example, the median detection probability in
 194 UC/EDs increased to 85% (58–98%) and 92% (69–99%) at the lowest incidence, respectively. Conversely,
 195 a decrease in the percentage forwarded to 25% decreased detection probabilities and test efficiencies,
 196 although the relative ordering of setting efficiency was preserved. Thus, for a novel influenza virus with
 197 similar severity to seasonal influenza, UC/ED settings are likely to provide greatest opportunities for case
 198 detection.

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 201 **Figure 1. Probabilities of detection and test usage under different severity scenarios.** (A) Assumed probabilities of
 202 presentation to a particular setting, calculated as $p_{symp} \times p_{seek}$ for UC/ED, hospital, and ICU settings. All cases
 203 are assumed to be in the community, resulting in a probability of one for that setting (not shown). (B) Assumed
 204 proportion of individuals with ILI or ARI tested in UC/ED, hospital and ICU settings, or proportion of all individuals
 205 tested in the community. (C) Estimated probability of detecting at least one novel case per month. Panels indicate

206 different assumed levels of incidence (100 and 1,000 novel cases). (D) Expected number of clinical tests used per
207 month. (E) Estimated test efficiency, calculated as the number of detected novel cases per 100,000 tests. (F)
208 Percent of all novel cases detected per month. In all panels, points represent median values across 10,000
209 simulations, inner shaded bands show 50th percentiles, and outer shaded bands show 95th percentiles.
210 Abbreviations: UC = urgent care; ED = emergency department; H = hospital; ICU = intensive care unit; Int 1 =
211 Intermediate 1; Int 2 = Intermediate 2; ILI = influenza-like illness; ARI = acute respiratory illness.

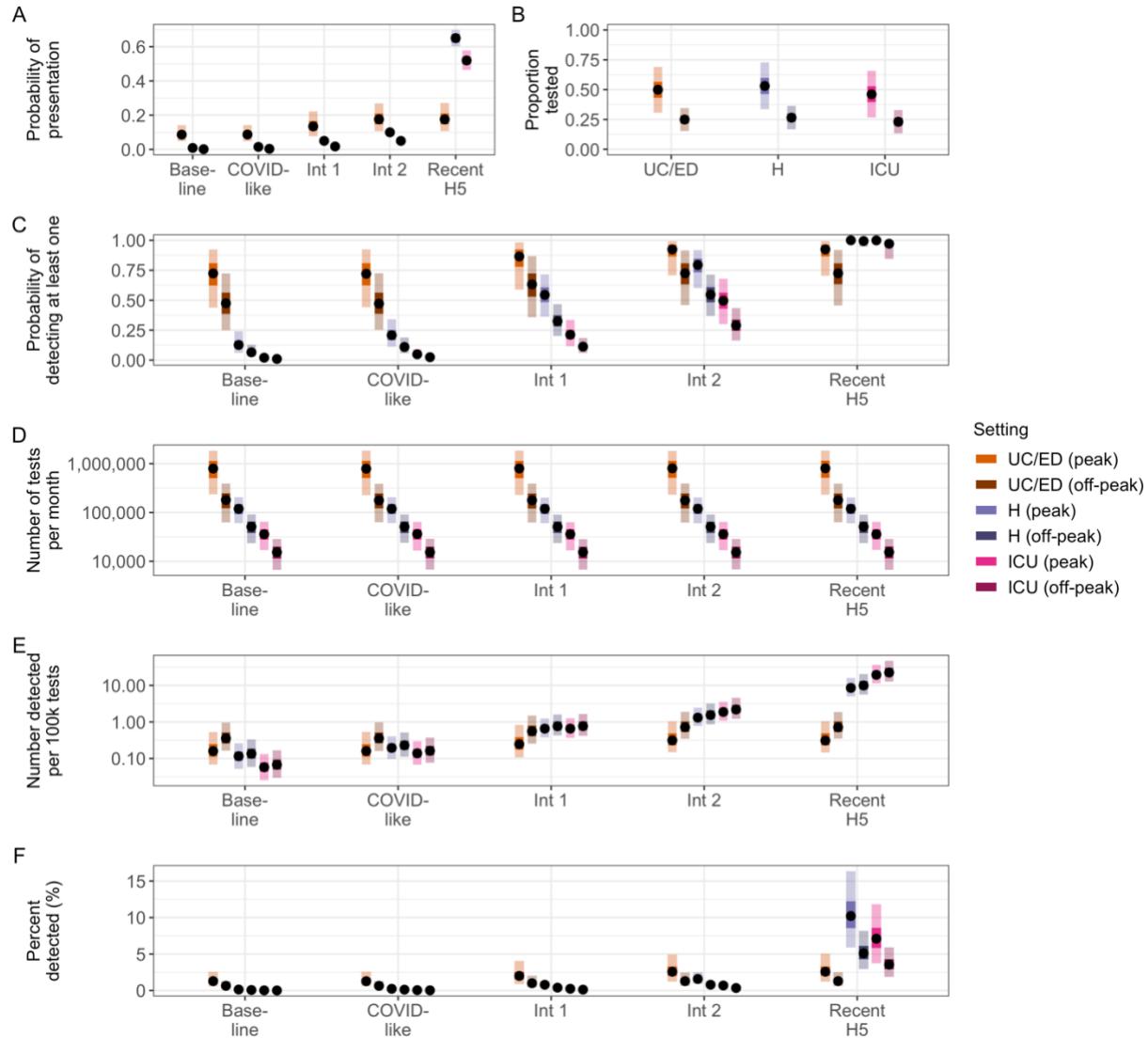
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213 Given uncertainty in the potential severity of a novel influenza virus, we explored additional scenarios in
214 which cases were more likely to develop symptoms and/or present to a particular healthcare setting
215 than the baseline severity scenario (Table 2; Figure 1A). As severity increased, the probability of
216 detection also increased across all healthcare settings due to the greater probability of requiring medical
217 attention (Figure 1C). The difference between detection probabilities in UC/ED compared with hospital
218 and ICU settings also decreased as cases were more likely to be severe and require admission to the
219 latter. For example, median detection probabilities for ICU settings increased from 2% (1–4%) and 19%
220 (9–35%) at baseline with 100 and 1,000 novel cases, respectively, to 100% (98–100%) and 100% (100–
221 100%) in the “Recent-H5” scenario. There were also substantial increases in testing efficiency in hospital
222 and ICU settings (Figure 1E) and increases in the percent of novel cases detected (for example, from a
223 maximum of 0.3% in hospital settings at baseline to 16% in the Recent H5 scenario; Figure 1F). Test
224 usage is driven primarily by background seasonal influenza virus testing and thus did not change across
225 severity scenarios (Figure 1D). Simulating an increase in clinical testing probabilities (p_{test} mean = 90%)
226 substantially increased detection probabilities and test usage for all healthcare settings but did not
227 impact the relative performance among settings (Figure S2).

228 Finally, we assessed how seasonal changes in background activity could impact probabilities of case
229 detection and testing efficiency. Assuming testing practices did not change seasonally led to equal
230 probabilities of detection in peak and off-peak periods, although testing efficiencies were increased in
231 off-peak periods due to the lower number of background tests conducted (Figure S3). Conversely,
232 assuming a 50% reduction in testing across all healthcare settings in off-peak periods (Figure 2B)
233 reduced the corresponding probabilities of detection (Figure 2C). However, for the most severe
234 scenarios (Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, and Recent H5) there was always at least one healthcare
235 setting with a median detection probability greater than 60% in off-peak periods at the lowest
236 incidence.

237 Discussion

238 We modeled the likelihood of detection of novel influenza virus cases occurring at low incidence in the
239 United States. We adapted a simple probabilistic framework that accounted for symptom severity, care-
240 seeking behavior, and testing practices in different healthcare settings, and used care-seeking and
241 testing information from recent influenza seasons to inform model parameters. We found that the most
242 efficient setting for detection depends on the severity profile of the novel influenza virus. Although the
243 percent of total novel influenza cases detected was relatively low, the probabilities of detecting at least
244 one case, and thus identifying novel influenza virus circulation, were high in at least one setting across a
245 range of different testing, severity, and specimen forwarding assumptions.

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Figure 2. Probabilities of detection and test usage in healthcare settings assuming reduced testing probabilities during periods of off-peak seasonal activity. Incidence is fixed at 100 novel cases in the population. (A) Assumed probabilities of presentation to a particular setting, calculated as $p_{symp} \times p_{seek}$. Ranges are constant in peak and off-peak periods. (B) Assumed proportion of individuals with ILI or ARI tested in peak and off-peak periods. Ranges are constant across severity scenarios. (C) Estimated probability of detecting at least one novel case per month. (D) Expected number of clinical tests used per month. (E) Estimated test efficiency, calculated as the number of detected novel cases per 100,000 tests. (F) Percent of all novel cases detected per month. In all panels, points represent median values across 10,000 simulations, inner shaded bands are the 50th percentiles, and outer shaded bands are the 95th percentiles. Abbreviations: UC = urgent care; ED = emergency department; H = hospital; ICU = intensive care unit; Int 1 = Intermediate 1; Int 2 = Intermediate 2; ILI = influenza-like illness; ARI = acute respiratory illness.

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260 The high probabilities of detecting at least one case that we have estimated here are relevant for public
261 health pandemic preparedness. The detection of one case would facilitate the implementation of public
262 health actions including increased testing strategies, further virus characterization, vaccine development

263 (if warranted), the implementation of appropriate public health control measures, and updated
264 recommendations for the use of influenza antiviral medications. One key parameter influencing the
265 detection probability was the probability of testing in each healthcare setting. We found that detection
266 probabilities could decrease if influenza testing is substantially reduced below in-season values (for
267 example, during off-peak months). However, it is also possible that clusters of cases and outbreaks could
268 be more likely to be detected and tested during off-peak months if clinicians remain vigilant for evidence
269 of atypical respiratory virus signs or symptoms. The detection probability was also influenced by
270 assumptions about the forwarding of clinical specimens. Our baseline value of 50% was informed by
271 subtyping information from hospitalized influenza infections between 2010–2019 [6]. However, we
272 included a lower bound of 25% to reflect recent post-COVID-19 pandemic trends and potentially
273 reduced forwarding in UC/ED outpatient settings [18]. We also included higher values up to 100% to
274 explore maximum attainable detection probabilities if all tests were forwarded and found a substantial
275 improvement in our estimates. Therefore, during the current H5N1 situation, it is critical that clinicians
276 maintain high testing frequencies and forward influenza A positive specimens to public health
277 laboratories for further testing when recommended. Finally, given the severity of prior H5N1 cases (for
278 example, there has been a 50% case-fatality proportion in cases identified since 1997 [1]), additional
279 strategies to increase testing in ICU settings may help increase the likelihood of detection and testing
280 efficiency, particularly during summer months when background acute respiratory illness rates are low.

281 Although the probability of detecting one case was generally high, the percent of total cases detected
282 was low, especially in the lower severity scenarios. This finding assumes there are no immediate
283 changes to testing or healthcare seeking behavior once the first case is detected, and arises because
284 detection of influenza through clinical settings requires someone to become symptomatic, seek care, be
285 tested in a timely manner, and have a positive specimen forwarded for further characterization.
286 Although community testing removes these barriers to identification, it is resource intensive and would
287 need to occur even in the absence of perceived novel influenza virus spread to be effective, potentially
288 requiring over 100 million tests per year at the level modeled in this analysis. Similarly, at-home or self-
289 administered tests could alleviate issues associated with care-seeking and clinical testing practices.
290 However, such tests would need to be specific to the novel influenza virus and undergo potentially
291 lengthy development and authorization procedures before being available for widespread use.
292 Pandemic planning efforts should therefore include strategies to rapidly increase testing of acute
293 respiratory illness cases in clinical settings once human-to-human spread of a novel influenza virus has
294 been identified or is likely. Such strategies should account for the possibility that many cases may not be
295 detected, even with increased testing.

296 There are several caveats to our modeling framework. First, as our primary aim was to estimate
297 detection capabilities once sustained human-to-human transmission is occurring within the United
298 States, we did not consider surveillance for earlier events that might spark such transmission, such as
299 spillover from infected animals or introductions from outside the United States. It is possible that these
300 events would be associated with a greater probability of testing due to relevant exposure histories, and
301 thus have a greater likelihood of being detected compared with our estimates. Second, we did not
302 stratify detection probabilities by age. The severity of seasonal influenza can vary substantially among
303 different age groups [27], and age patterns of severity may differ for a novel influenza virus compared to
304 seasonal influenza viruses due to immunological imprinting and age-related exposures to previous
305 circulating viruses [28, 29]. Age may also impact testing probabilities and healthcare seeking behavior

306 [30, 31], although mean testing probabilities for children <18 years were similar to those of adults ≥ 18
307 years in the VISION data used to parameterize p_{test} (for example, 55 vs. 50% in UC/ED for children and
308 adults, respectively). Including age in the current framework would require additional assumptions
309 regarding the cross-reactivity of the novel influenza virus with seasonal influenza viruses to infer age-
310 specific severity distributions, and thus reduce the generalizability of our results. Third, we did not
311 explicitly incorporate delays in case admission to hospital or ICU that could reduce the window for viable
312 virus detection relative to other settings. These delays are likely on the order of several days and are
313 captured within our conservative range for the proportion of care-seekers who are tested while virus is
314 still detectable [32]. Fourth, we modeled the United States as a single population and did not explicitly
315 consider spatial or other heterogeneities in care-seeking and testing practices. If such data were
316 available, our analysis could be replicated at finer resolution to assess local response and detection
317 capabilities. Fifth, data were not available to fully inform our test forwarding assumptions. Although we
318 considered a range in sensitivity analyses, further information would increase the accuracy of our
319 detection probability estimates. We also assumed perfect sensitivity and specificity for all forwarded
320 tests in line with evaluation of real-time RT-PCR tests for novel H1N1 variant influenza viruses [33].
321 Although minor reductions in sensitivity should not substantially impact our detection probability
322 estimates, reductions in specificity could lead to false positive results that we have not considered.
323 However, the number of false positive results is likely to be small unless testing reaches extremely high
324 levels, such as considered here in the community setting.

325 Finally, our assumed inputs for baseline testing and background activity were informed by previous
326 influenza seasons and may not reflect future changes to these values. Where possible, we developed
327 parameter distributions based on data from multiple influenza seasons, before and after the COVID-19
328 pandemic, to account for broad fluctuations in care-seeking behavior, testing practices, and seasonal
329 influenza dynamics. We also explored scenarios with increased testing to capture the potential impacts
330 of changes to healthcare surveillance following additional policy recommendations. More generally, our
331 estimates of detection probabilities and test efficiency reflect the combined uncertainty in each
332 underlying parameter value and should thus be robust to small changes in any single parameter.

333 Novel influenza viruses pose a potential pandemic risk, and prompt detection is critical to characterizing
334 the virus causing the infection and facilitating a rapid public health response. Here we demonstrate how
335 a simple probabilistic framework can be used to estimate novel influenza virus detection probabilities
336 through testing in different community and healthcare settings, and can help inform the targeting of
337 future testing efforts. Our work was motivated by the 2022–2024 H5N1 situation in the United States
338 but could be applied more broadly to other locations and/or other potential novel influenza viruses.

339

340 **Author Contributions:** **Sinead E. Morris:** Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Investigation;
341 Methodology; Visualization; Writing original draft; Writing - review and editing. **Matthew Gilmer:** Data
342 curation; Writing - review and editing. **Ryan Threlkel:** Data curation; Writing - review and editing.
343 **Lynnette Brammer:** Conceptualization; Writing - review and editing. **Alicia P. Budd:** Conceptualization;
344 Writing - review and editing. **A. Danielle Iuliano:** Data curation; Writing - review and editing. **Carrie
345 Reed:** Conceptualization; Investigation; Supervision; Writing - review and editing. **Matthew Biggerstaff:**
346 Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Supervision; Writing - review and editing.

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