

HARRISBURG, Pa. — UPI — State scientists today tentatively ruled out influenza as a cause of the mysterious illness that has killed 23 persons but said other viruses and poisons remain possible sources of the hard hitting disease.

Gov. Milton Shapp said preliminary reports from the state's virology laboratory in Philadelphia indicate the

illness that struck at least 161 persons who attended an American Legion convention in Philadelphia "most probably is not an influenza virus."

"At this time, however, it is still too early to be entirely conclusive," Shapp said at a news conference. He said the disease does not appear to be spreading.

Dr. Leonard Bachman, state health secretary, said tests were continuing but he said the latest data seemed to leave some other viruses or toxic

chemicals as the most likely cause of the mysterious ailment.

Supporting the possibility that some other type of virus might be involved were tests with specimens from three patients. Dr. Jay E. Satz, director of the virology division at the Philadelphia Bureau of Laboratories, said early results from those studies suggest a virus may be involved.

Officials at the National Center for Disease Control in Atlanta also said fungus-type diseases, primarily

histoplasmosis, remained a possibility.

The latest victim added to the state's confirmed list of Legion illness-related deaths was Mrs. Arlene E.

Muffley, 55, of Lycoming County. She died of pneumonia and underlying coronary disease and had attended the Legion convention two weeks ago that is the common link in all the cases.

"Even though we do not have any final answers, I'm somewhat relieved by information we do have available

this morning for it does not appear that this is an outbreak of swine flu," Shapp said.

"Our laboratory is of course continuing its exhaustive tests to discover the nature of the disease and we're hopeful that the results of these tests and other being conducted at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta will give us a more definitive answer in the near future."

It appeared the first viral test data from the CDC would be available

Friday.

But Dr. David Sencer, director of the CDC, said it may take scientists a week or more to find the agent responsible. And even then they might come up empty-handed.

The symptoms were those of severe influenza, but doctors said flu viruses are highly contagious and as of Wednesday there had been no evidence the ailment had spread beyond those linked with the convention.