

Guidance on Swabs for Testing and Sample Collection Instructions for COVID-19

Patients not admitted to hospital (including those in ER)

A single upper respiratory tract specimen will be accepted for COVID-19 testing. Upper respiratory tract specimens including a nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) **OR** viral throat swab collected in universal transport medium. NPS is preferred over a viral throat swab – information available to date suggests that a NPS has higher sensitivity than a throat swab for COVID-19 detection.

In-patients

For in-patients, it is recommended to collect a minimum of two specimens, from two different sites:

1. Upper respiratory tract: submit both a nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) AND viral throat swab.
Note: although the NP swab and throat swab use the same sampling kit, a separate kit (medium tube) is needed for each sample. Also, for the NP swab, the smaller swab is used, while for the throat swab, the larger swab is used.
2. Lower respiratory tract specimens: submit when possible.
3. Sputum: collect if patient has a productive cough. Do not induce.

Specimen Collection Kits and Alternates

The following specimen collection kits can be used for collection of nasal and nasopharyngeal specimens:

- [Virus Respiratory Kit order #: 390082](#)
- [Virus Culture Kit order #: 390081](#)

Alternates:

- BD 3mL Vial, one sterile Nylon flocked tip swab, scored plastic shaft # B220528
- BD 3mL Vial, one sterile mini-tip swab, scored plastic shaft # B220531
- Copan 3mL UTM standard flock Swab # CA302MH
- Copan 3mL UTM Pernalal flock Swab # CA305MH
- Copan Midturbinate - pediatrics swabs # CA56750CS01
- ESBE EZ Pro ESB-VA50005NP
- Hologic PRD 03546
- Hologic #301041
- Norgen i-Clean
- Norgen i-Clean/CY-93050
- Norgen i-Clean/CY-96000 paired with PBS Media
- Norgen i-Clean/CY-96000 paired with Roche/Cobas PCR mediaOxioid M6 Kit with Traditional-Tipped Flocked Swab # OXRE12568
- Oxoid M6 Kit with Micro-Tipped Flocked Swab # OXRE12569
- Puritan/25-3317-H paired with PBS media
- Puritan/25-3317-H paired with Roche/Cobas PCR media
- Roche PCR Media Uniswab Kit order #: 300295 (vendor catalogue 07958021190)

- Roche 0795802
- Sensor Health swab paired with Roche/Cobas PCR media
- Sensor Health kit paired with PBS media
- Trinity Biotech Bartels Flextrans Transport medium (B1029-90D) paired with iClean swab
- VWR/Starplex CA66410-030
- Yocon-virus sampling kit with VTM

Swabs can be ordered from the HMMS using this [online ordering form](#).

For additional information on alternative collection kits:

- [Public Health Ontario](#) website
- Email: PHOL.Warehouse@oahpp.ca
- Fax: 416-235-5753
- Phone: 1-877-604-4567

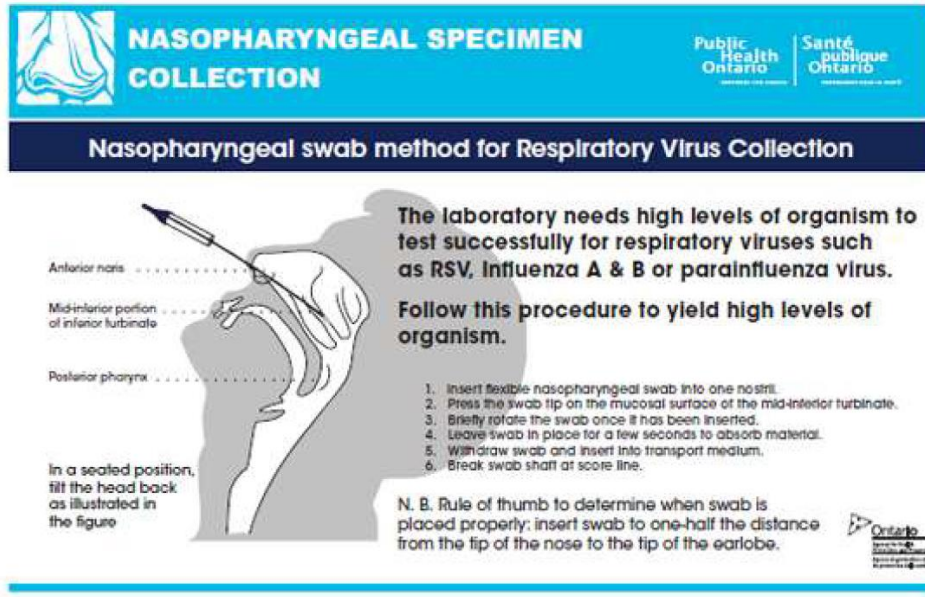
Note: Nasal or naso-pharyngeal swabs are preferred, but a throat swab is accepted. For more information on specimen collection, contact the lab or refer to the Public Health Ontario [testing guidelines](#)

Note: Testing guidance for COVID-19 changes frequently and is dependent on regional and provincial laboratory capacity. For up-to-date guidance on testing in the Middlesex-London region, please see the London Health Sciences Centre's [Pathology and Laboratory Medicine website at https://www.lhsc.on.ca/palm/labs/covid.html](https://www.lhsc.on.ca/palm/labs/covid.html).

Collecting NP Swab

1. Open the pouched seal pack and aseptically remove the sterile swabs from the package.
2. **If 2 swabs are present in the kits, use the smaller swab when collecting the NP sample.**
Discard the larger/thicker swab.
3. Collect the specimen from the site involved as early as possible following onset of symptoms (see picture below).
4. Aseptically remove cap from vial and insert swab in medium. (A separate medium is required for each swab).
5. Break swab shaft evenly at the scored line to fit in tube well below the cap and replace cap to vial closing tightly.
6. Label the specimen container with the patient's full name, date of collection and one other unique identifier such as the patient's date of birth or Health Card Number. Failure to provide this information may result in rejection or testing delay.
7. Complete all fields on the [PHOL COVID-19 specific requisition](#):
 - Patient's full name
 - Date of birth
 - Health Card Number (number match the specimen label)
 - Test requested – specify COVID-19
 - Specimen type
 - Reason for test – Diagnostic (serology is not available, including immune status)
 - Signs and symptoms – list all relevant
 - Onset date and date collected
 - Travel history within 14 days of symptom onset including all destinations and travel dates
 - Patient setting (e.g. ER, hospitalized, ICU_
 - Clinical information including whether the patient has pneumonia/lower respiratory tract infection and any associated risk factors

8. Place specimen in the biohazard bag and seal bag.
9. Insert the completed requisition in the pocket on the outside of the sealed biohazard bag.
10. To maintain optimum viability, the specimen should be stored and transported at 2-8 °C or on wet ice to the laboratory for processing within 72 hours of collection. Preference is for specimen to get to the Toronto Public Health Lab (PHOL) as soon as possible.
11. Results: turnaround time for testing is up to 4 days; this number does fluctuate with demand.



Collecting Throat Swab – 1 kit

1. Open the pouched seal pack and aseptically remove the sterile swabs from the package.
2. **If 2 swabs are present in the kit, use the larger/thicker swab for collecting throat sample.** Discard the smaller swab.
3. Collect the specimen from the site involved as early as possible following onset of symptoms.
4. Aseptically remove cap from vial and insert swab in medium. (A separate medium is required for each swab).
5. Break swab shaft evenly at the scored line to fit in tub well below the cap and replace cap to vial closing tightly.
6. Label the specimen container with the patient's full name, date of collection and one other unique identifier such as the patient's date of birth or Health Card Number. Failure to provide this information may result in rejection or testing delay.
7. Complete all fields on the [PHOL COVID-19 specific requisition](#). **The same requisition can be used for all COVID-19 samples.**
8. Place specimen in the biohazard bag and seal bag.
9. Insert the completed requisition in the pocket on the outside of the sealed biohazard bag.
10. To maintain optimum viability, the specimen should be stored and transported at 2-8 °C or on wet ice to the laboratory for processing within 72 hours of collection. Preference is for specimen to get to the Toronto Public Health Lab (PHOL) as soon as possible.
11. Results: turnaround time for testing is up to 4 days.

Sputum Collection: If patient has a productive cough. Do not induce. (Admitted patients only)

1. Open the biohazard bag and remove the sterile container.
2. Collect sputum specimens early in the morning, before eating. Do not submit pure saliva or nasal secretions. 5 ml sputum is optimal; the patient may expectorate several times.
3. Do not have patient rinse mouth with tap water before producing specimen.
4. Replace cap on container closing tightly.
5. Label the specimen container with the patient's full name, date of collection and one other unique identifier such as the patients date of birth or Health Card Number. Failure to provide this information may result in rejection or testing delay.
6. Complete all fields on the [PHOL COVID-19 specific requisition](#). **The same requisition can be used for all COVID-19 samples.**
7. Place specimen in the biohazard bag and seal bag.
8. Insert the completed requisition in the pocket on the outside of the sealed biohazard bag.
9. Transport the specimen to the Toronto Public Health Lab (PHOL) as soon as possible after collection. If transport is delayed more than one hour the specimen must be refrigerated.

Storage: Kits should be stored at 2-25 °C until used. Improper storage will result in a loss of efficacy.