

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) is releasing the following updates based on guidance released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on April 14, 2020, for COVID-19 specimen collection and shipping.

RECOMMENDED SPECIMEN TYPES

Outpatients

Nasopharyngeal specimen is the preferred choice for swab-based SARS-CoV-2 testing. When collection of a nasopharyngeal swab is not possible, the following are acceptable alternatives:

- Oropharyngeal specimens collected by a healthcare professional,
- Nasal mid-turbinate (NMT) swabs collected by a healthcare professional or by onsite self-collection using a flocked tapered swab, or
- Anterior nares (nasal swab; NS) specimens collected by a healthcare professional or by onsite self-collection (using a flocked or spun polyester swab).

For NS, a single polyester swab with a plastic shaft should be used to sample both nares. NS or NMT swabs should be placed in a transport tube containing either viral or universal transport medium, phosphate buffered or sterile saline.

If both NP and OP swabs both are collected, they should be combined in a single tube to maximize test sensitivity and limit testing resources.

Inpatients

Collection of both a lower respiratory specimen and a NP swab is recommended.

SPECIMEN COLLECTION INSTRUCTIONS

Maintain [proper infection control](#) when collecting specimens. Induced sputum sample collection should not be done.

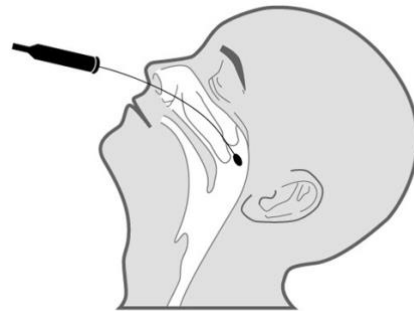
UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT

Nasopharyngeal Swab (NP)

Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing.

Following the directions below, collect a NP swab and insert the swab into a viral transport tube containing 1-3 mL viral transport medium (VTM) or equivalent.

1. Pass the NP swab through the nares. Resistance will be met. This will confirm contact with the nasopharynx.
2. Rub the swab tip across the mucosal surface several times. This will loosen and collect cellular material. Allow a time of contact of up to 30 seconds.
3. Withdraw the swab and place it in the tube containing VTM or acceptable alternative. Make sure the liquid medium covers the swab tip.
4. Break or cut the end of the swab
5. Screw the vial lid on tightly.



LOWER RESPIRATORY TRACK

Bronchoalveolar lavage, tracheal aspirate

Collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.

Sputum

Have the patient rinse the mouth with water and then expectorate deep cough sputum directly into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.

POSTMORTEM SPECIMENS

See CDC's the interim guidance for the collection and submission of postmortem specimens from deceased persons under investigation for COVID-19

[Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19](#)

SPECIMEN STORAGE

Store specimens at 2-8°C, and ship overnight on cold pack. If the specimen will not arrive at the Bureau of Laboratories within 72 hours of collection, freeze the specimen and ship it frozen the next business day.

SPECIMEN SUBMISSION FORM

1. Complete **all** information on the [BOL specimen submission form](#).
2. Complete the form with the submitter information and lab reporting fax number.
3. Submit the single form with the specimen.

SPECIMEN PACKAGING AND SHIPPING

Label the specimen container with the:

- patient's name and date of birth
- specimen source collection date

This patient and specimen information must appear on BOTH the specimen submission form and the specimen container or testing will NOT be performed.



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Bureau of Laboratories

**Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
Specimen Collection and
Shipping Guidance**

Include a cold pack and package the specimen as required by the regulations governing the shipment of Category B infectious substances. **Category B packaging MUST BE USED.**

Refrigerate packaged specimens if they will not be shipped immediately. Specimens **MUST** be kept cold until they reach the laboratory.

Ship specimens to:

**PA Department of Health
Bureau of Laboratories
110 Pickering Way
Exton, PA 19341**

Contact the BOL if you have questions about specimen collection or submission.

Phone: 610.280.3464

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