

# NYSDOH Wadsworth Center

## COVID-19 Specimen Collection, Handling, and Transport Instructions<sup>1</sup>



Department  
of Health

April 1, 2020

- These instructions supersede the instructions issued on March 25, 2020, and **apply only to specimens submitted to Wadsworth Center for COVID-19 testing.**
- Discuss transport processes with the Local Health Department (LHD).<sup>2</sup>
- Estimated turnaround time for suspect COVID-19 test results, from specimen arrival at the Wadsworth Center, is 1-2 business days.

### SPECIMEN COLLECTION

- While a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab is the preferred diagnostic specimen for COVID-19, if NP swab supplies are unavailable, **collection of one (1) nasal swab AND one (1) saliva specimen through healthcare personnel supervised patient self-collection is an acceptable alternative.**
  - If NP swab supplies are unavailable, and patient self-collection of nasal swab AND saliva specimen is not feasible (i.e. infant, child, or incapacitated adult), collection of one (1) nasal swab AND one (1) oropharyngeal (OP) swab continues to be an acceptable alternative.
- All specimen containers must be labeled with patient's first and last name, DOB, date of collection, and type of specimen. The label on the container must match the accompanying paperwork.
- Ensure specimen containers are leakproof, with caps **tightly** secured.
- For NP, nasal and OP swabs, flocked swabs are preferred since they provide better specimen recovery. Sterile dacron or rayon swabs with plastic or flexible metal handles may also be used. These are the same types of swabs and media used for influenza PCR testing. Do NOT use cotton or calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden sticks as they contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR.
  - After swabbing, place swabs in a sterile vial or tube containing at least 1.5-2.0mL of LIQUID viral transport, molecular transport or universal transport media (VTM, MTM, or UTM).
  - Dry swabs, not in transport media, are NOT acceptable for virus testing.

#### NP swab:

- *NP swab:* The healthcare personnel should insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate, to a depth equal to the distance from the nostrils to the outer opening of the ear. Leave the swab in place for several seconds to absorb secretions. Slowly remove the swab while rotating it. Place the swab in a sterile vial or tube containing at least 1.5-2.0mL of liquid media and **tightly** secure the cap.

<sup>1</sup> Please note: This document only refers to COVID-19 samples sent to the Wadsworth Center, Laboratory of Viral Diseases. These instructions do not apply to Blood Borne Pathogen (i.e. HIV or HCV) or microbiology testing. While other Wadsworth laboratories are located in the same building, specimens for testing in these other laboratories should be packaged and shipped separately.

<sup>2</sup> If a suspect case temporarily resides in a location such as a school/college or is a traveler visiting a jurisdiction, immediately report that to the county LHD where the individual travelled to or temporarily resides in.

## **Nasal swab AND saliva specimen (healthcare personnel supervised patient self-collection):**

- *Nasal swab:* Instruct the patient to insert the swab less than one inch into their anterior nostril and rotate several times against the nasal wall. Repeat in the other nostril using the same swab. Place the swab in a sterile vial or tube containing at least 1.5-2.0mL of liquid media and **tightly** secure the cap.
- *Saliva specimen:* Instruct patient to spit at least 3.0mL of saliva into an empty sterile specimen container, which may be a vial, tube or cup that can be closed securely. **Tightly** secure the cap.
- The nasal swab and saliva specimens must be transported to Wadsworth Center **within 24 hours** of specimen collection.

## **Nasal swab AND OP swab:**

- *Nasal swab:* The healthcare personnel should insert the swab less than one inch into anterior nostril and rotate several times against the nasal wall. Repeat in the other nostril using the same swab.
- *OP swab (e.g., throat swab):* The healthcare personnel should swab the posterior pharynx, avoiding the tongue.
- Place swabs in a sterile vial or tube containing at least 1.5-2.0mL of liquid media and **tightly** secure the cap. For Wadsworth Center testing, nasal and OP swab specimens should be **placed together in one vial or tube** of liquid media.

## **STORAGE, HANDLING, AND PACKAGING**

**\*The Wadsworth Center COVID-19 Packaging & Transport Checklist and Illustrations can help with this process\***

- The packaging MUST comply with all Category B shipping requirements, including package labeling (refer to IATA training course instructions).
- Place the specimens in a watertight secondary container (e.g. plastic biohazard bag) with absorbent material.
- Place the secondary container in a shipping box.
- Use a sturdy cardboard box, with a Styrofoam insert, to ensure a cold temperature is maintained.
- Storage: Until transported, the **swabs, and sputum (or other lower respiratory tract specimens), should be kept cold (refrigerated at 4°C (2-8°C))** and transported, as soon as possible, using frozen cold packs.
  - Packaging: Pack the box with 2-3 **frozen** gel packs; samples must remain cold for the entire duration of shipment. **Do NOT use wet ice or dry ice.**
- Fill out a [NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Infectious Disease Requisition \(IDR\) Form](#). Alternatively, the [Wadsworth Center Remote Order Entry](#) is available.<sup>3</sup>
  - One form can be used for multiple samples on the same patient, provided all samples are collected on the same day. The IDR form must be included and can NOT come in contact with the specimen.
  - Enter NYSDOH Outbreak Number: OMS202015920.

<sup>3</sup> Contact the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Laboratory of Viral Diseases for further details: (518) 474-4177 or [www.wadsworth.org/programs/id/virology](http://www.wadsworth.org/programs/id/virology). For more information on Wadsworth Center remove order entry, visit: [www.wadsworth.org/electronic-test-request-reporting-new](http://www.wadsworth.org/electronic-test-request-reporting-new).

## TRANSPORT

- Routine virology specimens are classified as Category B Infectious Substances.
- Packages should be transported to:

**Laboratory of Viral Diseases**

**David Axelrod Institute,**

**Wadsworth Center**

**120 New Scotland Ave**

**Albany, NY 12208**

**Healthcare Providers with questions or public health concerns, please contact the [LHD](#).**

**LHDs with questions or public health concerns should notify the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4439, Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, or after hours at (866) 881-2809.**

## RESOURCES AND TRAINING

- All persons involved in packing and shipping human clinical specimens for testing must receive training, such as the [CDC Packing and Shipping Training](#), or another certified training program.