



April 1, 2020

TO: Healthcare Providers, Healthcare Facilities, Clinical Laboratories, and Local Health Departments
FROM: New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH)
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC)

HEALTH ADVISORY: NOVEL CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)
Update on Specimen Collection and Handling
to Allow Nasal Swab AND Saliva Specimen as Acceptable Alternative Specimen Collection

SUMMARY

- This advisory supersedes specimen collection and handling guidance from NYSDOH, released on March 25, 2020. This update further extends previous recommendations that nasal and oropharyngeal swab specimen collection is an acceptable alternative, with **recommendations for the collection of one (1) nasal swab AND one (1) saliva specimen through healthcare personnel (HCP) observed patient self-collection for specimens submitted to Wadsworth Center, if nasopharyngeal (NP) supplies are unavailable.**
 - **If using a laboratory other than the Wadsworth Center**, follow the laboratory's guidance for all specimen collection, handling, and transport processes, including whether nasal swab AND saliva specimen, or nasal swab AND OP swab specimen collection methods are acceptable alternatives to an NP swab.
- For any suspected COVID-19 cases, ensure appropriate infection control precautions are in place and immediately notify the infection control lead at your facility and the local health department (LHD).
- Review local testing options for those who do not require clinical outpatient/inpatient medical care.

SITUATION UPDATE

- As of April 1, 2020, there have been 172,196 COVID-19 cases with 3,399 deaths in the U.S.
- As of April 1, 2020, [New York](#) had 75,795 reported cases of COVID-19 with 43,139 in NYC and 32,656 in the rest of state, with 1,550 deaths.

COVID-19 SPECIMEN COLLECTION AND HANDLING FOR WADSWORTH CENTER TESTING:

- 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 HCP observed 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.

Recommended COVID-19 Specimen Collection for Wadsworth Center Testing:



- Nasal swab AND saliva specimen may be done through patient self-collection with HCP instruction and observation.
 - *Nasal swab*: Instruct the patient to insert the swab less than one inch into their anterior nostril and rotate several times against nasal wall. Repeat in the other nostril using the same swab. Place in a vial containing at least 1.5-2.0mL of liquid media (VTM, MTM, or UTM) 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 securely closed. **Tightly** secure the cap.
 - Package both the nasal swab vial and saliva specimen together, with the appropriate paperwork for shipment, to the lab in accordance with NYSDOH Wadsworth Center specimen collection, storage, and packaging guidance.
 - NOTE: The nasal swab and saliva specimens must be transported to Wadsworth Center **within 24 hours** of specimen collection.
- HCP Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):
 - The ease of sampling for this specimen protocol allows for the patient to collect the specimens while the HCP provides instruction and observes the collection from a distance of 6 feet or greater.
 - Accordingly, as the exposure risk for the HCP to respiratory secretions is minimized, the HCP observing the sampling should wear a facemask and gloves, as well as eye protection, if available (face shield or goggles).
 - NOTE: These PPE recommendations do **NOT** apply if the HCP is directly collecting the specimen (whether NP, nasal, or OP). If the HCP is directly performing the specimen collection, then previously issued guidance regarding PPE recommendations for HCP specimen collection should be followed.
- For all swabs (NP, nasal, and OP): Flocked swabs are preferred as 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.

- Further testing guidance can be found on the [NYSDOH COVID-19 website](#) including:
 1. Specimen collection, storage, and packaging guidance.
 2. The Wadsworth Center Infectious Disease Requisition (IDR) form. This form must be filled out for each patient and sent to the Wadsworth Center with the specimen.
 3. A packaging and transport checklist.
- In healthcare settings where direct care of the patient is provided, HCPs should IMMEDIATELY:
 1. Implement infection control precautions as directed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings](#).
 2. Contact your Infection Preventionist or Infection Control Lead for further guidance.

Providers with questions can contact their [LHD](#) or the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4439, Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, or 1-866-881-2809 during evenings, weekends, and holidays.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [NYSDOH COVID-19 Website](#)
- [NYS Local Health Department Directory](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Website](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) COVID-19 Website](#)

NYSDOH Wadsworth Center COVID-19 Specimen Collection, Handling, and Transport Instructions¹



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).²
- 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.

¹ 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.

² 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.³
 - 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.

³ Contact the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Laboratory of Viral Diseases for further details: (518) 474-4177 or www.wadsworth.org/programs/id/virology. For more information on Wadsworth Center remote order entry, visit: 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.