

# GAS Outbreaks: Specimen Collection, Management, and Transport

Updated Jan 2024

This reference document is intended for use by public health staff from DOH and the County Municipal Health Departments (CMHDs) that are responsible for the epi investigation of Group A *Streptococcus* outbreaks that require colonization screening among residents and/or healthcare personnel. Instructions are provided to guide public health staff in requesting test kits, communications with the Bureau of Laboratories (BOL), and facility-level logistics.

## Requesting Test Kits

- Use the Supply Order Form (updated 1.26.2024) to order supplies.
- Email the form to [BOL-ADMIN@pa.gov](mailto:BOL-ADMIN@pa.gov) with a cc to Karen Gane ([kgane@pa.gov](mailto:kgane@pa.gov)) and Sarah Norris ([sanorris@pa.gov](mailto:sanorris@pa.gov)).
- Email Sarah Norris ([sanorris@pa.gov](mailto:sanorris@pa.gov)) and Karen Gane ([kgane@pa.gov](mailto:kgane@pa.gov)) to request a field investigation (FI) number.
- BOL will provide FI#, the shipping date and tracking number for the supplies.
- The DOH or CMHD staff should notify the facility when supplies will be delivered to the facility and how they can be tracked.

## Email Template to send to BOL

Hello BOL colleagues-

See attached supply order form for GAS test kits. The facility will also need an FI#.

Tentative date of collection is [Insert Day of Week], [Insert Month] [Insert Date].

The approximate number of patients being tested is #. Throat swabs will be collected on all patients as well as # wounds. The facility plans to ship on [Insert Date].

Will this be feasible for BOL?

Please confirm and send back tracking information for the supplies.

Thank you,

[Insert DOH or CMHD representative]

## Facility-Level Logistics

- Screening sites
  - Residents: pharynx, skin lesions, gastrostomy, nephrostomy, and insertion sites (only include insertion sites if evidence of skin breakdown, redness, or irritation is present).
  - Healthcare personnel: pharynx and skin lesions.
  - As needed, provide the facility with the wound and throat collection instructions, located in resources section of document.
- Collection details
  - Ensure the facility can receive an outer shipping box marked with temperature sensitive labeling containing a Styrofoam container with the necessary supplies including swabs, biohazard bags, absorbent papers, and cold packs; **immediately upon receipt, the facility should place the cold packs in the freezer.** Swabs can be kept at room temperature until specimens are collected. Once collected, the swabs should be shipped

immediately with the frozen cold packs; if they cannot be immediately shipped, the specimens should be refrigerated until they can be adequately packed.

- Coordination between BOL and BOE, or the CMHD, is necessary.
- Aim for Mon/Tues/Wed collection; avoid specimen collection at the end of the week or over a holiday. Early shipment also allows for same-week result release; if BOL receives samples Wednesday late afternoon or Thursday/Friday, samples will be tested the following week.
- Facility staff should write the required information on the specimen collection tube: name, DOB, specimen source, collection date. Information must match what is provided to BOL in the Mass Testing Log or BOL submission form.
- Conducting large screenings (≥10 specimens)
  - Do not send the individual BOL submission forms.
  - Use the mass testing log; instructions are located on the first sheet of the Excel spreadsheet and should be reviewed closely with the facility. The mass testing log serves as the lab requisition form.

Note: Complete a row for each specimen source, i.e., if patient has three source collections that would be three rows.
  - Facility should complete all required fields and email the Excel file (not a PDF) to the district ERA or CMHD contact.
  - The district ERA or CMHD contact will review the testing log for completeness and to verify that no field is incomplete.
    - If the testing log is complete, the ERA or CMHD will email the log to BOL as noted in the mass testing log instructions including Karen Gane ([kgane@pa.gov](mailto:kgane@pa.gov)) and Christina Russell ([chrussell@pa.gov](mailto:chrussell@pa.gov)).
    - If the testing log is incomplete, the ERA or CMHD will work with the facility to complete all fields prior to emailing to BOL.
  - The facility must also print the completed spreadsheet and send a hard copy with the specimens in the shipment container.
- Conducting small screenings (<10 specimens)
  - Facilities should fill out individual BOL submission forms for each specimen
    - Please ensure the necessary fields are completed including submitter information and a valid fax number for results;
    - Individual forms should be placed in the biohazard the bag with the collection tube for each specimen.
- Shipping information
  - Inside the box, each specimen should be in an individual biohazard bag and the collection tubes should include the identifiers that are listed under collection details.

Note: Specimen tubes and paperwork are required to have two matching identifiers:

    1. Patient first and last name,
    2. Plus one of the following: date of birth, age and gender, medical record number.

\*The lab accession number IS NOT a patient identifier.

    - **If identifiers fail to match on the specimens and accompanying paperwork, the specimen will be rejected.**

- Cold packs should also be included to ensure that the specimens remain moderately cold.
- For larger collections, a printed copy of the completed mass testing should be included; for smaller collections, individual BOL submission forms should be included in each pocket of the biohazard bag.
- Include the receiver's address (BOL) and the submitter's return address (facility) on the shipping box. The specimens should be sent to:

**Pennsylvania Department of Health**  
**Bureau of Laboratories**  
**110 Pickering Way**  
**Exton, PA 19341**
- **Important Packaging Note:** Affix any included biohazard and cold-pack stickers provided by BOL on the outside of the shipping box; this will make the lab aware that the container is holding samples that are temperature sensitive and cannot be left at the delivery dock for an extended period.
- Once the box is ready, the facility should follow the instructions in the "Bacterial Throat Culture Shipping Guidance from the Bureau of Laboratories" included in the resources section; the document provides instructions on how to arrange for a courier to pick-up the shipment. As a reminder, calls to the courier must be made by noon for delivery the next business day.

## Resources

- 1) iGAS Mass Testing Log NEW Universal v11.7.2023
- 2) Supply Order Form GAS\_1.26.2024
- 3) [How to Collect a Throat Swab for Culture](#)
- 4) [How to Collect a Wound Culture](#)
- 5) [Bacterial Throat Culture Shipping Guidance from the Bureau of Laboratories](#)