

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is releasing the following updates based on guidance released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on March 12, 2020, for COVID-19 specimen collection and shipping. This is an update to the guidance that was released on March 10, 2019.

- For outpatients, collection of only a Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab is now recommended. Do not collect oropharyngeal (OP) swab nor sputum on outpatients.
- For inpatient, collection of both a lower respiratory specimen and NP swab is recommended for specimen collection.
- Health care providers should contact the DOH at **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** or local health department about possible cases of COVID-19.
- Local and state public health staff will determine if the patient meets the [criteria for a patient under investigation \(PUI\)](#) for COVID-19.
- Clinical specimens should be collected from PUIs for routine testing of respiratory pathogens at either clinical or public health laboratory.
- Testing at the BOL and/or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Specimen Type

Collection of only the NP is recommended for outpatients. Collection of two specimen types, lower respiratory and upper respiratory, is recommended for inpatients only.

Specimens should be collected as soon as possible once a PUI is identified regardless of symptom onset. Maintain [proper infection control](#) when collecting specimens. Induced sputum sample collection should not be done.

A. Lower Respiratory Tract

1. Bronchoalveolar lavage, tracheal aspirate - collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.
2. 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.

B. Upper Respiratory Tract

1. Nasopharyngeal swab (NP) **only**

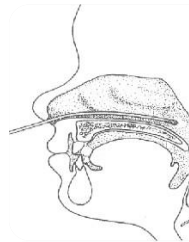
- a. Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate

swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing.

- b.** 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. If by chance both a NP and an OP swab have been collected insert both swabs into the **same** tube.

2. Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab - See diagram below

- a.** Pass the NP swab through the nares.
- b.** Resistance will be met, and this will confirm contact with the nasopharynx.
- c.** Rub the swab tip several times across the mucosal surface. This will loosen and collect cellular material.
- d.** Allow a time of contact of up to 30 seconds.
- e.** Withdraw the swab and place in the viral transport media (VTM or UTM). Make sure liquid medium covers the swab tip.
- f.** Break or cut the end of the swab and screw the vial lid on tightly.



4. Nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal aspirate (OPTIONAL).

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

C. Interim Guidance for Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons Under Investigation (PUI) for COVID-19, February 2020:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>

Submission Forms and Storage

[BOL Specimen Submission Form](#)

1. Complete all information on the BOL specimen submission form and send the paperwork with the sample.
2. Write the PUI number on the form obtained from DOH or your local health department.
3. Store specimens at 2-8°C for up to 72 hours after collection. If a delay in testing or shipping is expected, store specimens at -70°C or below.

Packaging Instructions

1. Label the container with patient's name, DOB, source and the collection date.
2. This information must appear on **BOTH** the specimen and the specimen submission form or testing will **NOT** be performed.
3. The specimen(s) must be transported with a cold pack in a closed crushproof container to comply with Category B, diagnostic specimen, regulations. This is not optional.

Shipping Instructions

1. If approved, shipping instructions will be provided by the BOL with consultation.
2. Refrigerate specimens if they will not be shipped immediately. Specimen **MUST** be kept cold until it reaches the laboratory.
3. Address the package:

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

For questions: Contact Lisa Dettinger (ldettinger@pa.gov) or Maria Strohecker (mstrohecke@pa.gov) at the Bureau of Laboratories 610-280-3464.