



Date: July 10, 2020
To: All Health Care Sites and Providers
From: Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
Re: COVID-19 Collection Kit Guidance

PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE

Key message:

- Multiple collection devices for COVID-19 testing have been deployed during the pandemic. This will continue in order to keep up with high volumes of testing, supply allocation and supply chain issues.
- This document is a guide on how to use different kinds of collection kits that may be received at your site.
- Because the design of the swabs differ, throat swabs should not be used as nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs and vice versa. If you only have a specific swab type but cannot collect from the appropriate site, follow instructions below.

Important background information:

- Multiple collection kits containing different swab, tube, and media types have been deployed in Alberta to deal with shortages. This has resulted in the need to deploy throat swabs or NP swabs at different times. Although AHS procurement and APL make every attempt for sites to have a consistent supply of the same collection kits, this has not and will not always be possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collection kits from manufacturers with whom we have not had prior experience must also be used.
- Although APL performs quality control to detect any deficiencies before deployment, problems (i.e., leaking tubes) have occasionally been detected post-deployment and may arise in the future. Please follow instructions below on how to report any problems with the collection kits that you may find.
- NP swabs and throat swabs have equivalent sensitivity for COVID-19. NP swabs are better than throat swabs for the detection of infection by other respiratory viruses (i.e., influenza). All media deployed have been tested to determine suitability for COVID-19 testing. UTM/VTM, saline, and eSwab media are suitable for other respiratory virus testing.
- Acceptable sources of collection for COVID-19 include: throat or NP swabs, NP or endotracheal tube aspirates, and bronchoalveolar lavages. If available, it is recommended that lower respiratory tract specimens be submitted in addition to a throat or NP swab for patients with evidence of lower respiratory tract disease. Re-collection is



only indicated if results of the test are reported as indeterminate or the clinical suspicion of COVID-19 is high and initial results are negative.

- Once specimens are collected, refrigerate tubes or store on ice. If no refrigeration or ice is available, store and ship to the lab at room temperature within 48 hours of collection.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

Note: Documents can be searched for on the internet by including AHS or APL in the search.

Collecting and submitting specimens for COVID-19 testing:

- Alberta Precision Laboratories Test Directory- Search "COVID"
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/webapps/labservices/indexAPL.asp?id=8549&tests=&zoneid=1&details=true>
- Acceptable specimens document
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-apl-acceptable-swab-types-for-covid-testing.pdf>
- Nasopharyngeal and throat collection instructions:
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/plab/wf-provlab-collection-of-nasopharyngeal-and-throat-swab.pdf>
- Throat swab Instruction Sheet
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-saline-transport-medium-collection.pdf>
- Instructional Video on collection, breaking swab shaft and submission of specimen
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqMrBDQchOs&feature=youtu.be>

Problems with collection Kits:

Send an e-mail with a description of the problem and photos of the problematic collection kit.

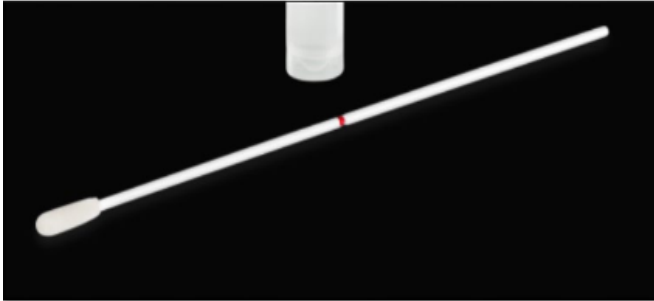
- South and Calgary Zone: Kimberly.Tang@aplabs.ca
- Central, Edmonton and North Zone: Maria.Falsetti@aplabs.ca

Ordering kits for your site:

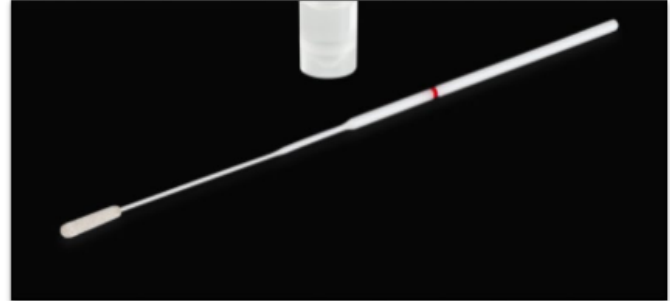
- Calgary and Edmonton Zone:
 - Submit this form by fax. Request the NP FloqSwab – APL Public Health Laboratory will send you throat or NP swabs depending on your site and current supplies.
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/plab/wf-provlab-specimen-collection-kit-order-form.pdf>
- North, Central and South Zones:
 - Follow routine established processes for requesting specimen collection supplies. Otherwise contact your local Alberta Precision Laboratory.
- Please note that you may not receive the number of kits requested. The number of kits distributed depends on the type of site requesting (eg. hospital ward vs community clinic) and availability of swabs at the time of distribution.



Differences between throat and NP swabs:



THROAT SWAB- Straight shaft uniform thickness.



NASOPHARYNGEAL SWAB- Thick base with narrow flexible shaft attached to the head of the swab. Head of the swab is smaller than a throat swab.

Using an NP swab as a throat swab

- **It is not recommended to use an NP swab to swab the throat and should not be done based on patient preference.** Test performance (sensitivity/specificity) of such specimens has not been determined.

Using a throat swab as a nasal swab

- Nasal swabs are suboptimal compared to a nasopharyngeal or throat swab for COVID-19 testing
- If you have only throat swabs and cannot swab the throat, a nasal swab can be done using the throat swab:
 - Tilt the head back as you would for an NP swab.
 - Insert the swab in the nostril and go as far back as you can (about 3-4 cm, when resistance is felt). This should cause some discomfort.
 - Rotate three times.
 - Repeat in the other nostril.
 - Insert the swab into the media provided as you would for either type of swab.

Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:

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