



## 2020 Health Alert #12: New York City Public Health Laboratory Now Accepting Nasal Swabs and Saliva Specimens for COVID-19 testing

- The New York City Public Health Laboratory (PHL) continues to offer COVID-19 testing specimens for hospitalized patients with acute lower respiratory illness.
- PHL is now accepting nasal swabs and saliva with nasopharyngeal swabs for COVID-19 testing to confirm sensitivity of these less invasive specimens.
- Once sensitivity is confirmed, patients may be able to self-collect these specimens, reducing the need for direct collection of specimens for testing by healthcare workers and the associated PPE required for such collection.

April 27, 2020

Dear Colleague,

The New York City Public Health Laboratory (PHL) continues to offer COVID-19 testing for hospitalized patients with severe acute lower respiratory illness (e.g., pneumonia). (Note that all testing requires pre-approval. See below for additional information.) On April 17, 2020, PHL began accepting nasal swabs and saliva, in addition to the previously accepted specimen types. **We request that all of the following specimens be collected in their respective individual receptacles for each patient for whom COVID-19 testing will be conducted at the PHL (if adequate supplies for collection are available):**

- 1 nasopharyngeal (NP) swab
- 1 nasal swab (anterior nares)
- 1 saliva specimen

**NOTE:** At this time, we ask for **all three specimens** to be collected whenever possible. When data from three site collection supports that the clinical sensitivity of nasal swab and/or saliva specimens is commensurate to NP swab, we will advise that NP swabs are no longer necessary. Once sensitivity is confirmed, patients may be able to self-collect these specimens, reducing the need for direct collection of specimens for testing by healthcare workers and the associated PPE required for such collection.

Please review [this document](#) for more information on nasal swab and saliva specimen collection.

Talk with your hospital administrators about getting a supply of nasal swabs put into patient care areas as these are currently more readily available in the supply chain than those needed for NP and oropharyngeal (OP) swabbing.

Combined NP and OP swabs (in one sterile tube with 3 ml of viral transport media) and lower respiratory specimens such as sputum or tracheal aspirate will continue to be accepted.

To obtain approval for PHL testing, contact the NYC Health Department Coronavirus Testing Call Center by calling the Provider Access Line (PAL) at **866-692-3641**.

We greatly appreciate your partnership during these very challenging times.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer L. Rakeman*

Jennifer L. Rakeman, PhD  
Assistant Commissioner and Laboratory Director  
New York City Public Health Laboratory  
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene