



## Instructions for Submission of Specimens for COVID-19 Testing at the New York City Public Health Laboratory

Healthcare providers ordering a COVID-19 test at the NYC Public Health Laboratory (PHL) must follow these instructions.

### 1. Order your test through eOrder

- Log in to the PHL eOrder system at [a816-phleorder.nyc.gov/PHLeOrder](https://a816-phleorder.nyc.gov/PHLeOrder). For instructions on how to create an account and use eOrder, visit [nyc.gov](https://nyc.gov) and search for **PHL eOrder user guide**.
- Complete an eOrder requisition form for **each specimen**. For example, if you are submitting a nasopharyngeal swab, a nasal swab and a saliva specimen from the same patient, you need to order three tests at the same time. Three requisitions will appear once the test order is submitted.
- Populate all required fields (noted in red) before submitting an order. While not required, include information in additional fields for data that is readily available (for example, email address and date of symptom onset).
- **Place only one specimen in each specimen bag** and seal it tightly; place the corresponding form in the outer pocket of the bag.

### 2. Acceptable Specimen Types and Collection Guidance

#### A. Specimen Types

- Upper Respiratory Tract:
  - Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport media (VTM) (3 mL) (**preferred**)
  - Nasal swab (anterior nares) in VTM (3 mL)
  - Saliva: at least 3 mL in a sterile, leak-proof container
- Lower Respiratory Tract:
  - Bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL): 2-3 mL in a sterile, leak-proof container
  - Tracheal aspirate: 2-3 mL in a sterile, leak-proof container

#### B. Specimen Collection Guidance

- General guidance:
  - Swabs must be synthetic (non-cotton), non-absorbent and flocked, and be placed into 3 mL of VTM.
  - Swabs not in VTM will not be tested.
  - Flocked swabs are preferred, but sterile dacron or rayon swabs with plastic or flexible metal handles are also acceptable.
  - Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden sticks.
- Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab:
  - Insert a NP swab into the patient's nostril parallel to the palate, to a depth equal to the distance from the nostrils to the outer opening of the ear.
  - **Note:** To avoid specimen contamination, do not touch the swab tip to anything other than the internal nostril and nasopharynx.

- Leave the swab in place for several seconds to absorb secretions and slowly remove the swab while rotating it.
- Place the swab in a sterile vial or tube containing 3 mL of VTM and tightly secure the cap.
- Nasal swab:
  - Insert, or instruct the patient to insert, the nasal swab 1-1.5 cm into a nostril (anterior nares). Rotate the swab against the inside of the nostril for 10-15 seconds while applying pressure to the outside of the nostril. Repeat on the other nostril with the same swab, using external pressure on the outside of the other nostril.
  - **Note:** To avoid specimen contamination, do not touch the swab tip to anything other than the inside of the nostril.
  - Remove swab from nostril and place the swab into the tube containing 3 mL of viral transport media. Break the swab at the noted break line and cap the tube tightly.
- Saliva:
  - The patient should not eat, drink, smoke or chew gum or tobacco for 30 minutes prior to collection.
  - Instruct the patient to spit at least 3 mL of saliva into a sterile, leak-proof container. This may be a vial, tube or cup that can be closed securely and tightly.
- Lower respiratory tract specimens:
  - For BALs and tracheal aspirates, collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof container. This may be a vial, tube or cup that can be closed securely and tightly.

### 3. Label the specimen

Failure to properly label the specimen will result in rejection and the specimen will not be tested.

- Specimen tubes **must** be labeled with:
  1. Patient's first and last names
  2. Patient's date of birth
  3. Date of collection
  4. Specimen source
- All information on the specimen label must **exactly match** the information on the eOrder form, including the spelling and order of the patient's first and last names.

### 4. Specimen handling

- Keep specimens refrigerated while awaiting transport.
- Transport specimens with cold ice packs within 72 hours from the time of specimen collection. If transporting past 72 hours, freeze at -70°C and transport on dry ice.
- Follow shipping regulations for UN 3373 Biological Substance, Category B when sending potential SARS-CoV-2 specimens. Visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) and search for **Interim Guidelines for Biosafety and COVID-19** for more information.
- For additional specimen handling and collection guidance, visit [nyc.gov](https://www.nyc.gov) and search for **Public Health Laboratory**.

### 5. Additional Information and Resources

- If you have any questions, email [PHLeOrdersupport@health.nyc.gov](mailto:PHLeOrdersupport@health.nyc.gov).
- Visit [nyc.gov/health/covidproviders](https://www.nyc.gov/health/covidproviders) and sign up for the Health Alert Network (HAN) at [nyc.gov/health/HAN](https://www.nyc.gov/health/HAN) to receive updates and information from the Health Department.
- Visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) and search for **Interim Guidelines for Clinical Specimens for COVID-19** for guidance on collecting and handling specimens associated with COVID-19 in a healthcare setting

or at the point-of-care.

- Visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) and search for **Interim Guidelines for Biosafety and COVID-19** for guidance on handling and processing specimens associated with COVID-19 in a laboratory setting.
- Visit [wadsworth.org/covid-19](https://www.wadsworth.org/covid-19) and click **Instructions for NYSDOH Wadsworth Center COVID-19 Specimen Collection, Handling and Transport** for guidance on collecting, handling and submitting specimens to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Wadsworth Center.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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