

# COVID-19 Instructions on specimen collection

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This document provides information on how to take **nasopharyngeal**, and **oropharyngeal + anterior nasal** specimens for COVID-19.

A **nasopharyngeal swab** (use swabs with flexible shafts) placed into a viral transport media (VTM) will obtain the optimal specimen and is the preferred collection method for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing due to its higher sensitivity in detecting the virus.

An **oropharyngeal** with an **anterior nasal swab** (use swabs with more rigid shafts) may be considered for the following:

- a) For border and managed isolation and quarantine facility workers undergoing high frequency swabbing (fortnightly and in some cases weekly) who do not tolerate the nasopharyngeal swab.
- b) Health practitioners may also request the alternate swab if someone is experiencing problems receiving the nasopharyngeal swab.

**The swab manufacturer may vary by region – please consult with your local pathology provider as to which swab type to use.**

## NASOPHARYNGEAL COLLECTION

### Preferred Option - Instructions on nasopharyngeal specimen collection

Nasopharyngeal swabs can be used for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing.

1. Wear appropriate PPE.  
*This includes disposable, fluid resistant long-sleeved gown, gloves, surgical mask, and eye protection.*
2. **Ensure patient blows nose prior to collection.**
3. Using a synthetic fibre-tipped flexible shaft
4. nasopharyngeal swab, insert swab into **one** nostril.  
For adequate collection the swab tip must extend well beyond the anterior nares until some resistance is met (see diagram).
5. Press on swab tip and rotate the swab tip a couple of times across the mucosal surface to collect cellular material.
6. Break swab into VTM provided. **Ensure there is no leakage.**
7. Label specimen with patient's full name, date of birth AND/OR NHI number, and collection time and date.



## OROPHARYNGEAL (THROAT) and ANTERIOR NASAL

### Alternative option – Instructions on oropharyngeal and nasal specimen collection.

Oropharyngeal and nasal swabs can be used for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing. Oropharyngeal specimens on their own should not be taken if there are no symptoms as they are unlikely to collect an adequate amount of virus.

1. Wear appropriate PPE.  
*This includes disposable, fluid resistant long-sleeved gown, gloves, surgical mask, and eye protection.*
2. **Ensure patient blows nose prior to collection.**
3. Use a tongue depressor to hold the tongue out of the way
4. Using a **viral** oropharyngeal swab (DO NOT use standard bacterial swabs), **swab both tonsillar beds** and the back of the throat.
5. **Using the SAME swab**, insert into one nostril until the flocked tip is no longer visible and rotate a few times. **Repeat** for the other nostril.
6. Depending on regional supply, either break swab into VTM provided (**Ensure there is no leakage**) or place swab back into barrel containing the foam VTM.
7. Label specimen with patient's full name, date of birth AND/OR
8. NHI number, and collection time and date.

