

# Public Health Laboratory Specimen Collection and Transport for COVID-19 Testing

Please read these instructions carefully as issues with specimens, forms, and labeling can lead to specimen rejection or testing delays. DO NOT collect or send specimens to the Public Health Lab (PHL) until instructed to by DPH.

- PHL aims to result tests within 2 business days of receipt of specimen, but delays could occur based on volume and capacity. For up to date information, visit the Health Professionals' [COVID-19 PHL testing webpage](#).

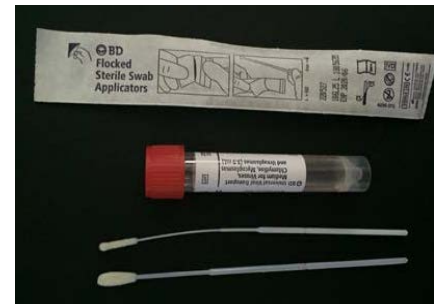
## APPROPRIATE TESTS

- **For all patients:** Collect TWO upper respiratory specimens - one oropharyngeal (OP) swab and one nasal specimen (either nasopharyngeal (NP) swab, nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal aspirate swab,)
- **For patients with a productive cough:** collect one lower respiratory specimen (sputum, bronchoalveolar lavage or tracheal aspirate) in addition to the upper respiratory specimens.
- Outpatient settings should only collect an NP and an OP swab.

## SPECIMEN COLLECTION

### Note About NP and OP swabs

- Use synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts such as ones used to collect specimen NP swabs for influenza testing (see figure). Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts.
- Use sterile tubes with at least 1ml of viral transport media
- Each swab must be placed into a separate vial.



- **Oropharyngeal Swab** - Swab the posterior pharynx, avoiding the tongue. Immediately place swab in transport media.
- **Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab** - Insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate. Leave the swab in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions. Immediately place swab in transport media.
- **Nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal aspirate** - Collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.
- **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.
- **Bronchoalveolar lavage or tracheal aspirate:** Collect 2-3 mL in a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.

## FORMS AND SPECIMEN LABELING

- Complete a COVID-19 PHL H-3021 [Test Requisition form](#) for each specimen. The following information must be in the "other" field of the test request section of the form:
  - For NP swabs - novel coronavirus 2019 PCR and Biofire Respiratory panel
  - All other specimens (OP swabs, sputum, BAL, and endotracheal aspirates) - novel coronavirus 2019 PCR
- Test request forms MUST include full patient name, date of birth, medical record number, sex, date/time collected, specimen source, and the hospital or clinic where the specimen was collected.
- **The specimen source on the tube MUST match the source on the form.**

## SPECIMEN STORAGE AND TRANSPORT

- Refrigerate specimens at 2-8°C and transport on cold pack, preferably as Category B.
- Ship specimens by courier to: Los Angeles County Public Health Laboratory, Attn: Molecular Epidemiology Unit, 12750 Erickson Avenue, Downey, CA 90242
- Public Health will provide a courier only to facilities with no other alternate means of specimen transport.
- Upon approval by LAC DPH, the PHL will contact your laboratory to discuss specimen transfer. Specimens that arrive at PHL without prior DPH approval may experience significant delays in testing