

Division of Laboratory Medicine

Bacteriology

Respiratory samples for culture

General information

Collection container (including preservatives):



Specimen type: Bronchial aspirate, transthoracic aspirate, bronchoalveolar lavage, transtracheal aspirate, bronchial brushings, protected catheter specimens, bronchial washings, endotracheal tube specimens, sputum – expectorated

Collection: All specimens should be fresh and taken before antimicrobial treatment is started. Sputum samples for routine culture that are not 'purulent' or 'mucopurulent' will not be tested by the microbiology laboratory.

Specimen transport: If processing is delayed, refrigeration is preferable to storage at ambient temperature. Delays of over 48hr are undesirable.

Minimum volume of sample: 1 mL

Special precautions: Do not submit samples with push top lids or with Trap tubing still attached. These samples are prone to leaking which poses a safety risk to individuals involved in transportation and receipt of sample as well as risking contamination of the sample. Please ensure samples are sent in standard universal tubes with screw top lids (as per photos above). Samples that fail to comply may be rejected.

Laboratory information

Measurement units: Not applicable

Biological reference units: Not applicable

Turnaround time for provisional result (working days): 2 days

Turnaround time to final result (working days): 2-3 days

Sputum investigation requiring fungal investigation is up to 7 days

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Clinical information

Clinical decision points: Not applicable

Factors known to significantly affect the results: All samples are suitable for overnight refrigeration only, they must not be stored over a weekend. Sputum may be refrigerated for up to 2-3 h without an appreciable loss of pathogens. Any delay beyond this time may allow overgrowth of Gram-negative bacilli, and Haemophilus species and S. pneumoniae may be rendered non-viable

(Last updated November 2024)