

Division of Laboratory Medicine

Molecular Microbiology

Coronavirus COVID-19 Testing for SARS-CoV-2

General information

Collection container:

- This guidance should be used for sending samples to PHL Manchester for COVID-19 testing following identification of the patient that meets the national case definition. Refer to national guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-initial-investigation-of-possible-cases/investigation-and-initial-clinical-management-of-possible-cases-of-wuhan-novel-coronavirus-wn-cov-infection#interim-definition-possible-cases>
- The regional COVID-19 request form (E28 form) must be completed https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/868264/PHE_2019-COVID-19_Testing_Request_Form_E28.pdf

Specimen type: The following samples must be sent:

- Upper respiratory tract (nose and throat swab or NPA)
- Lower respiratory tract if possible (sputum, BAL or ETA)

The Laboratory can test for SARS-CoV-2 on a nose and throat swab. Swab each site with a separate swab and place both swabs in one tube of Virus Transport Medium (VTM). If a patient is producing sputum then please send sputum as well as a nose and throat swab.

If a nose/throat swab is collected, swab the throat first and then the nose.

Refer to national guidance at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-guidance-for-clinical-diagnostic-laboratories>

Specimen transport:

Arrange transport to PHL Manchester

- Label package clearly for Virology with 'PRIORITY 10' label.
 - Virology Reception, 3rd Floor, Clinical Sciences Building One, MRI, M13 9WL or, out of hours,
 - Central Specimen Reception, Ground Floor, Clinical Sciences Building One, MRI, M13 9WL
 - Packages should be labelled with 'PRIORITY 10' for all specimens for COVID-19 testing, with the exception of known positive patients.
 - Packages should be labelled with 'PRIORITY 20' for all known positive COVID-19 patients' specimens.
- Samples must be sent in Category B transport containers. Follow the diagram below for instructions on packaging samples to send for testing.
- Category B transport http://www.who.int/ihr/publications/who_hse_ihr_2012.12/en/

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Place samples into a bubble wrap envelope with absorbent pad and seal

Place samples into plastic cylinder and seal the top. Include the request form **outside** of the cylinder

Place cylinder into Cat B transport box

Seal the box using the blue sticker provided

- Please keep the specimen separate from other pathology specimens.
- All other pathology specimens should be transported in the usual way so they are not delayed.

Minimum volume of sample: Minimum volume 700µl

Special precautions: All samples must be sent in accordance with Cat B transport guidance.

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

Laboratory information

Measurement units: Positive or Negative

Biological reference units: Not applicable

Turnaround time for result (working days): 24 hr is the target turnaround time.

Turnaround times will be dependent on the progression of the COVID-19 outbreak and the number of specimens received for testing. Lower respiratory tract specimens may also require additional time for make safe/pre-examination processing.

Clinical information

Clinical decision points: Not applicable

(Last updated November 2025)