## COVID-19 RT-PCR Specimen Collection and Handling

**Purpose:** To provide guidance on specimen collection and handling for rapid, urgent, and routine RT-PCR testing.

### Specimen Requirements

**Preferred:** Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab

**Acceptable:** Nares or nasal mid-turbinate swab (consider for patients with contraindication or concern with obtaining NP swab)  
- Nasal wash and aspirates in sterile container  
- Bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) in sterile container (Urgent or Routine only)

**Container:** 2-3 mL of viral transport medium or saline (blue top media vial). Always check expiration date before use.

**Specimen Stability:** Up to 72 hours at 2-8°C

**Swab Collection Guidelines:**  
- NP Collection [COVID-19 Nasopharyngeal Specimen Collection One Point Lesson](https://example.com/np_collection)  
- NMT Collection [COVID-19 Nasal mid turbinate (NMT) swab collection](https://example.com/nmt_collection)

### Special Instructions for RAPID Testing

**Indications for RAPID**
- Critically ill patients and/or likely ICU admission
- ED/transfer patients needing to go to OR or other dedicated procedure room within 6-8 hours including trauma 99s/Code STEMIs
- Labor and delivery in actively laboring moms
- Same day admit patients unable to get a pre-admission test
- Ambulatory patients undergoing aerosol generating procedure with no previous result

**Requisition Order for RAPID**
For patient with previous COVID-19 testing result – a repeat test within 3 days prior to procedure is NOT required. Recent results needed for discharge to skilled nursing facility should use the non-rapid test with an expected result time of 6 hours. Providers who want to continue ordering the RAPID test when clinically justified can fill out a downtime requisition and send it with the sample.  

>> [Complete Downtime Requisition Form](https://example.com/downtime_requisition)

- Indicate physician name, collection date/time, source, symptomatic or asymptomatic, and LABSTATCOV2 in “OTHER”

### Turn-around Time (TAT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Turn-around Time (TAT)</th>
<th>Biohazard Bag Color</th>
<th>Send to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAPID (LABSTATCOV2)</td>
<td>L&amp;D</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Orange (regular)</td>
<td>Clinical Lab, P-tube #222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAPID (Downtime Requisition Form)</td>
<td>All other areas</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Orange (regular)</td>
<td>Clinical Lab, P-tube #222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URGENT (LABSARSCOV2)</td>
<td>• Inpatient</td>
<td>4-6 hours</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>ED Alpha, P-tube #446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• *Pre-op</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Pre-op: orange dots if next day surgery</td>
<td>ED Alpha, P-tube #446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occ Health</td>
<td>4-6 hours</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>ED Alpha, P-tube #446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROUTINE (LABSARSCOV2)</td>
<td>• Inpatient</td>
<td>24-72 hours</td>
<td>Orange (regular)</td>
<td>Clinical Lab, P-tube #222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-op</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clinical Lab, P-tube #222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occ Health</td>
<td>24-72 hours</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Clinical Lab, P-tube #222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambulatory</td>
<td>24-72 hours</td>
<td>Orange (regular)</td>
<td>300P Clinical Lab, F17 window</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ED must refer to ED COVID-19 testing algorithm**

## Lab Quality, 08/31/2020