

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.

Priority Type	Location	Turn-around Time (TAT)	Biohazard Bag Color	Send to:
RAPID (LABSTATCOV2)	L&D	2 hours	Orange (regular)	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
RAPID (Downtime Requisition Form)	All other areas	2 hours	Orange (regular)	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
URGENT (LABSARSCOV2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inpatient *Pre-op 	4-6 hours	Green *Pre-op: orange dots if next day surgery	ED Alpha, P-tube #446
	Occ Health	4-6 hours	Red	ED Alpha, P-tube #446
ROUTINE (LABSARSCOV2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inpatient Pre-op 	24-72 hours	Orange (regular)	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
	Occ Health	24-72 hours	Blue	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
	Ambulatory	24-72 hours	Orange (regular)	300P Clinical Lab, F17 window

ED must refer to ED COVID-19 testing algorithm

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 STEMI
- 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](#)

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

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](#)
NMT Collection [COVID-19 Nasal mid turbinate \(NMT\) swab collection](#)