



MDH Laboratories Administration Viral Transport Media (VTM) Specimen Collection and Packaging Guidance for COVID-19 Testing

This Power Point presentation is intended to provide guidance on proper specimen collection and packaging for COVID-19 specimens.

Additional guidance is available a:

<https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/Pages/Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>

COVID-19 Specimen Collection Instructions

- After collection of an upper respiratory specimen (NP and/or OP (throat)), place the swab in the viral transport media. **(Note: Bacterial transport media is not an acceptable transport media for COVID-19 testing.)**



- Hold the specimen tube with one hand and break the swab stalk by carefully bending against the tube sidewall.



- Take care that the swab stalk is not projecting out of the tube. **Screw the lid on tightly to prevent specimen leakage. Specimens that leak in transit to the laboratory will be rejected. Leaking specimens are hazardous. They can contaminate and lead to COVID-19 infections of those who are exposed to them.**



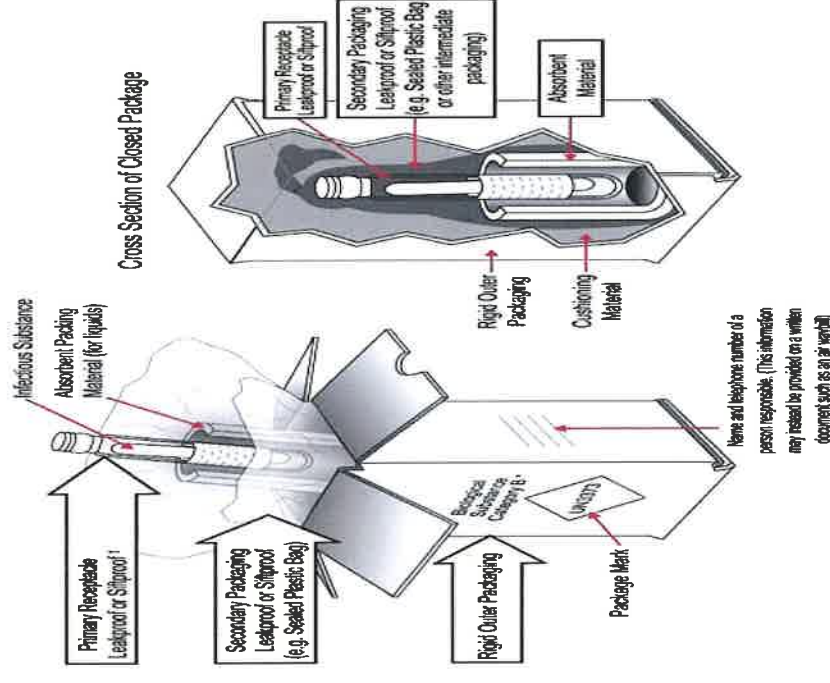
- Verify the patient's first and last name are written clearly on the specimen tube.

COVID-19 Specimen Storage

- If specimen will be sent and received by testing laboratory within 72hrs then specimens must be refrigerated (2-8°C).
- Place the specimens in separate “COVID-19” labeled cooler(s) and pack the cooler(s) with cold packs not wet ice.
- Contact the MDH Lab Outfits Unit for labeled Styrofoam coolers and cold packs (email mdhlabs.outfits@maryland.gov or call 443-681-3777).
- If a delay in specimen shipment to the laboratory, then specimens must be stored frozen at $\leq -70^{\circ}\text{C}$ and shipped frozen on dry ice.

COVID-19 Specimen Packaging

- Basic triple packaging systems include a primary receptacle. This receptacle is the specimen tube with parafilm fastened around the screw cap lid to prevent leakage. **Double check that the specimen lid is secured tightly.**
- Place the specimen tube along with the required absorbent material inside a secondary container. The secondary container for diagnostic specimens is a sealed biohazard bag.
- The secondary container is then securely placed within an outer shipping container (tertiary container), generally a corrugated cardboard box with cushioning material inside to surround the 2nd container or a cooler. Add cold packs to outer box/cooler. Contact the MDH Lab Outfits Unit if you need cold packs (refer to slide#4). **Do not send specimen(s) on ice cubes. Make sure the cooler is small/medium in size. More than one specimen (each in their own biohazard bag) with appropriate lab requisition form may be placed in the outermost container.**
- The outermost container bears the name, address, and telephone number of the shipper. In addition, the complete name and shipping address of the recipient, plus any required shipping markings should be written clearly. Label outside container “COVID-19 specimens”.





**For additional questions or concerns, please
contact the Laboratories Administration
during normal business hours at
443-681-3791 or 443-681-3792.**