



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Robert R. Neall, Secretary

**Laboratories Administration**  
Robert A. Myers, Ph.D., Director  
1770 Ashland Avenue  
Baltimore, Maryland 21205

**DATE:** March 13, 2020

**TO:** Medical Laboratory Directors, Local Health Officers  
and Health Care Providers

**FROM:** Robert A. Myers, Ph.D.   
Director, Laboratories Administration

**RE:** **UPDATED COVID-19 Specimen Shipping and Collection Instructions**

Now that COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) transmission levels have reached community spread, the use of Category B shippers is NOT required if you are sending the specimens using the MDH Laboratories Administration couriers that pickup at the local county health departments or private carrier. The state couriers' pickup specimens Monday thru Friday for delivery to the MDH laboratory. Specimens for COVID-19 testing must be shipped refrigerated on cold packs in a separate container from the specimens sent for routine testing at the MDH laboratory.

**If your facility is sending the COVID-19 specimens by public carrier (e.g. FedEx) you must continue to use the Category B shippers as required.**

**Triple packaging procedures are still required but any insulated box maybe used as the outer packaging. Label the outside container "Coronavirus Specimens".** Basic triple packaging systems include a primary receptacle such as a tube with adhesive tape around the screw cap or a plate with parafilm around the edges. The primary (1st) receptacle, along with required absorbent and cushioning material, is placed inside a secondary (2nd) container. The 2nd container for diagnostic specimens should be a sealed biohazard or Ziploc bag. The 2nd container is then securely placed within an outer shipping container (tertiary (3rd) container), generally a corrugated cardboard box with cushioning material inside to surround the 2nd container. This outermost container bears the name, address, and telephone number of shippers, name of person responsible with 24/7 telephone number, and the complete name, shipping address, and telephone number of the recipient. Include an itemized list of contents in a sealed plastic bag, placed between the 3rd and 2nd containers.

Please note changes to the most recent CDC specimen collection guidelines which is attached.

For questions or concerns, please contact the Laboratories Administration during normal business hours at 443-681-3791, 443-681-3792 or 443-681-3800 (main number). For all calls after hours please contact the Laboratories Administration at 410-925-3121.

Attachment

cc: Frances Phillips  
Dr. David Blythe  
Dr. Monique Duwell  
Dr. Cliff Mitchell  
Dr. Richard Brooks  
Ruth Thompson

**UPDATED COVID-19 Specimen Collection Instructions:**  
**Change to Collection of Nasopharyngeal Swab (NPS) For Outpatients**

*Following recent CDC guidelines only one upper respiratory specimen a Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab is necessary to be collected from outpatients for COVID-19 testing.* Collection of two specimen types, lower respiratory and upper respiratory, is still recommended for **hospitalized** patients for COVID-19 testing. Specimens should be collected as soon as possible once a Person Under Investigation (PUI) is identified regardless of symptom onset. Maintain proper infection control when collecting specimens.

**Upper respiratory (nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) only):** Collect a nasopharyngeal swab in a viral transport media tube (2-3ml). Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts as they may inhibit PCR testing or inactivate some viruses. Insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate. Leave the swab in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions. Place swab, after collecting patient specimen, directly into 2-3 ml of viral transport media. Refrigerate specimens at 2-8°C and ship on ice pack to the Maryland Department of Health Laboratory.

**Lower Respiratory (sputum, bronchoalveolar lavage, and tracheal aspirate): (Hospitalized Patients/Patients with Pneumonia)** For bronchoalveolar lavage and tracheal aspirates collect 2-3 ml into a leak-proof, sterile, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container. Refrigerate at 2-8°C and ship on ice pack to the Maryland Department of Health Laboratory. For sputum collections, have the patient rinse their mouth with water and then expectorate deep cough sputum directly into a leak-proof, sterile, screw-cap sputum collection cup.

**Nasopharyngeal Wash/Aspirate or Nasal Aspirate:** For NP wash/aspirate or nasal aspirate, collect 2-3 ml into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container. Refrigerate specimen at 2-8°C and ship on ice pack to the Maryland Department of Health Laboratory.

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