

UW Medicine

Nursing Protocol for Obtaining Nasopharyngeal Swab Samples

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Purpose: To outline the procedure to obtain nasopharyngeal (NP) swab specimens for respiratory infection testing

Collecting NP swabs is an important tool in the diagnosis of a variety of upper and lower respiratory tract infections including influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19 virus). The quality of the specimen collection is critical, and the correct collection of the specimen is directly linked to the sensitivity of the test.

Materials:

For respiratory viruses- universal transport media (UTM) with flexible (HMC, MS#51264) or standard (UWMC) Minitip FLOCKED swab.

- Use this swab for any viral respiratory test (for example, influenza)
- Check expiration date prior to use
- Do NOT use bacterial flocked swabs

Procedure:

1. Ensure that all infection prevention & control steps are followed including:
 - a. Hand hygiene before and after the procedure and before and after the patient encounter
 - b. Follow isolation status of patient. Minimum PPE includes mask, eye protection and gloves, but should be expanded to gowns for inpatients given likely higher burden of virus.
2. If the patient has nasal congestion or a moderate-large amount of rhinorrhea, ask them to clear their nose into a tissue
3. Apply the label to the UTM tube
4. Tilt their head back slightly and ask them to close their eyes, if possible
5. Insert the Minitip flocked swab into the nostril PARALLEL to the palate until resistance is met by contact with the nasopharynx.



6. Leave swab in place for 2-3 seconds then rotate completely around for 10-15 seconds. Note: Although not painful, patients generally feel very uncomfortable with this procedure. Be prepared for them to pull their head and/or body away. This procedure may also generate a cough so prepare to move to the side if possible, especially after completing the process.
7. Remove swab and repeat the same process in the other nostril with the same swab.
8. After the second swab is completed, immediately place into the sterile vial containing the universal transport media. The shaft of the swab is snapped off at the red line. This line usually aligns with the length of the swab that can fit into the tube.
9. Ensure that cap is closed tightly
10. Place the tube into a biohazard bag with an absorbent cloth (comes with the swab package and follow protocol for delivery at your facility).