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**Date:** March 19, 2020  
**To:** All Health Care Providers  
**From:** Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory  
**Re:** Interim recommendations for COVID-19 sample collection

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**PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE**

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**Key Messages:**

- Due to global shortages of swabs and transport media, different collection methods are required to detect COVID-19.
- For COVID-19 assessment centres or assessment sites should collect nasal swabs using the APTIMA® Unisex or Multitest Swab Specimen Collection Kits.
- Other sites are to continue current processes.
- Due to a limited number of collection kits, we cannot guarantee fulfilling orders for these kits to community practices. **Supplies are being preferentially triaged to hospitals, emergency rooms, urgent care sites, COVID-19 assessment centres/sites.** As the situation evolves, we will communicate any changes to this process.
- There is no change to specimen collection for other viruses (e.g. measles, mumps, HSV/VZV).

**Action Required:**

- When testing for COVID-19:
  - **Assessment centres and sites:** Collect a deep nasal swab using the APTIMA® Unisex or Multisite Swab Specimen Collection Kits. ONLY COVID-19 will be tested. See the Addendums 1 and 2 below for collection instructions.
  - **All other sites:** Collect an NP FLOQSwab® in UTM. For NP swab collection instructions: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/plab/wf-provlab-collection-of-nasopharyngeal-and-throat-swab.pdf>
- When testing for other respiratory viruses (respiratory pathogen panel [RPP], influenza/RSV):
  - **Only use the NP FLOQSwab® swab and UTM collection kit.**
  - Only order when the results will change clinical management in hospitalized or emergency room patients, for respiratory outbreak patients, for immunocompromised/transplant patients, or if approved by the Virologist on-call (Edmonton 780-407-8822; Calgary 403-333-4942).
  - These specimens will also have COVID-19 testing performed in parallel.
  - Requests for RPP or influenza/RSV on community patients will automatically be tested for COVID-19 ONLY.
- Strongly reconsider if testing is necessary for any lab test, especially those requiring a swab with UTM (e.g. RPP, HSV/VZV).

**Ordering information**

- **Assessment Centres/Sites:** Order APTIMA® Unisex or Multisite Swab Specimen Collection Kits, contact APL – Public Health Laboratory
  - Edmonton- Maria Falsetti (email: [Maria.Falsetti@albertaprecisionlabs.ca](mailto:Maria.Falsetti@albertaprecisionlabs.ca))
  - Calgary- Kimberly Tang (email: [Kimberly.Tang@albertaprecisionlabs.ca](mailto:Kimberly.Tang@albertaprecisionlabs.ca))



- **Other Sites:** NP FLOQSwab® and UTM kits, use your routine ordering procedures.
- When submitting collection kit orders, use the following form:  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/plab/wf-provlab-specimen-collection-kit-order-form.pdf>

**Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:**

Dr. Nathan Zelyas, Medical Microbiologist, APL – Public Health Program Leader for Respiratory Viruses  
[Nathan.Zelyas@albertapubliclabs.ca](mailto:Nathan.Zelyas@albertapubliclabs.ca); 780-407-8921

**This bulletin has been reviewed and approved by:**

Dr. Graham Tipples, Medical-Scientific Director, Public Health, APL



**ADDENDUM 1: APPEARANCE AND USE OF RESPIRATORY VIRUS COLLECTION KITS**

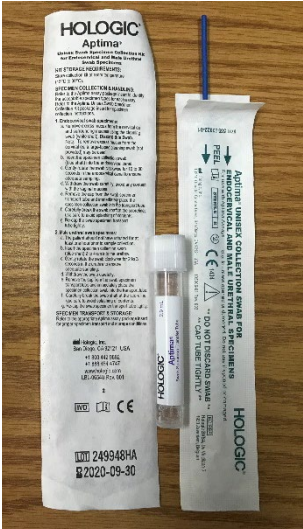
**APTIMA® Unisex Swab Specimen Collection Kit**

APTIMA® transfer tube (white top with foil, white label, clear fluid)

Use **blue swab** for nasal collection

Discard white cleaning swab

Use if **ONLY COVID-19** testing needed



**APTIMA® Multisite Swab Specimen Collection Kit**

APTIMA® transfer tube (white top with foil, **orange label**, clear fluid)

Use **pink swab** for nasal collection

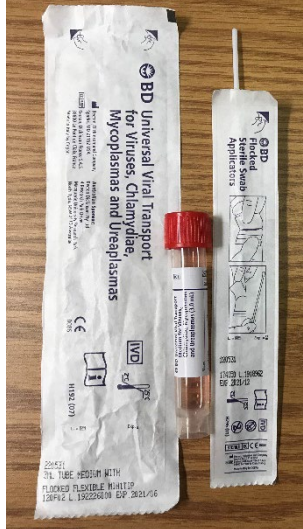
Use if **ONLY COVID-19** testing needed



**Universal Transport Medium (red top tube with pink fluid)**

**FLOQSwab®** (white swab) as NP swab

Use for RPP or rapid influenza/RSV (COVID-19 will also be tested)





**ADDENDUM 2: TESTING INSTRUCTIONS FOR COVID-19 USING APTIMA® UNISEX OR MULTISITE SWAB SPECIMEN COLLECTION KIT**

1. Store tubes at room temperature.
2. Fill out the requisition provided for COVID-19 or enter into your EMR and label the tube with:
  - Name and date of birth
  - Unique identifiers (MRN or Alberta Health Care Number)
  - Time of collection
  - Site of collection (nasal)
  - Include ordering provider (designated medical officer of health or other physician) on the requisition.
  - If using a printed label make sure the label is properly affixed to the tube
3. Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as per protocol for collection of COVID-19 NP samples.
4. Explain procedure to the patient.
5. Ask the patient to tilt his/her head back. Insert the Unisex (blue) and Multisite (pink) swab approximately 3 cm (or until you encounter resistance). Rotate the swab inside of the nostril for 3 seconds, covering all surfaces. Repeat the procedure in the other nostril with the same swab.
  - If patient is an infant or nasal swab is not possible, collect a throat swab using the same collection device
6. While holding the swab in your hand, unscrew the tube cap (foil top). Do not spill the tube contents. Immediately place the swab into the transport tube so that the line is in line with the top edge of the tube and carefully break the shaft. The swab will drop to the bottom of the vial. **DO NOT FORCE THE SWAB THROUGH OR DO NOT PUNCTURE THE FOIL CAP.**
7. Discard the top portion of the shaft. Tightly screw the cap onto the tube.
8. Place tube in biohazard bag. Place requisition in pouch outside of the bag.
9. Refrigerate tubes or store on ice if possible. If no refrigeration available, store at room temperature and ship to the lab within 24 hours.

Nasal Swab Specimen Collection

