



**Date:** April 29, 2020  
**To:** All Health Care Providers  
**From:** Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory  
**Re:** New collection kit for COVID-19 and respiratory virus testing

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

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**Key message:**

- **Polyester and cotton-tipped throat swabs with tubes of sterile saline will be distributed for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogen panel (RPP) testing.** This is in addition to the eSwab™ collection kits for throat swab collections.
- Saline has been validated at APL/AHS for COVID-19 testing and the RPP.
- Until sufficient stocks of nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs are in place, universal transport medium (UTM) and NP swabs will continue to be preferentially distributed to bone marrow transplant, solid organ transplant, hematology/oncology, and critical care wards.
- NP swabs and NP aspirates remain the specimen source of choice for COVID-19 and RPP testing. Throat swabs are a suitable alternative.
- Primary care clinics will not be receiving routine shipments to test for COVID-19. Swabs and transport media are being triaged to hospitals, congregate care facilities, and COVID-19 assessment centres.

**Background**

- Shortages of standard collection kits require the use of alternative swabs and transport media.
- Multiple swab types and transport media have been evaluated for respiratory virus detection (including COVID-19).
- COVID-19 assessment centres will continue to receive APTIMA® kits.
- As per a previous bulletin, the use of throat swabs for COVID-19 and RPP is an interim solution until enough NP swabs are available.

**Action Required**

- See the below table for available collection kits for each setting. **Do not use swab types other than those indicated in the table.**
- Throat swabs provided may not have a breakpoint and will require scissors (decontaminate scissors with 70% alcohol between samples) or twisting to break the handle.
- The availability of different swab and media types will change in the short term. You may receive a variation in the types of NP swabs and media or throat swabs and media.
- Continue to order tests as per current processes.
- NP aspirates can also be submitted in the saline transport medium for COVID-19 and RPP testing.
- **Please note:** the throat swab and tube used for the sterile saline transport medium may change depending on available supplies.

**Regardless of tube appearance, tubes will be labelled as 0.85% saline with an expiration date**

**Example of throat swab and saline tube**





**Patient care sites and collection kits that will be distributed**

Site	Collection kit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bone marrow transplant</li> <li>• Solid organ transplant</li> <li>• Hematology/Oncology</li> <li>• Critical Care units</li> </ul>	<p><b>Current</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NP swab and Universal/Viral Transport Medium (UTM)</li> </ul> <p><b>Near future (days to weeks)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NP swab and sterile saline will also be supplied in lieu of UTM in the future</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital inpatient units not named above</li> <li>• Emergency Departments/Urgent Care</li> <li>• Congregate living facilities (eg, long-term care, continuing care, corrections)</li> <li>• Other medical facilities based on availability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Current</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throat swab and sterile saline</li> <li>• eSwab™ collection kit</li> </ul> <p><b>Near future (days to weeks)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other kits with throat swab and saline or UTM may be distributed</li> <li>• NP swabs will be distributed in lieu of throat swabs when available</li> </ul>
Assessment Centres (approved locations only)	APTIMA® Multitest or Unisex kits

**Previous relevant bulletins with figures and instructions for other collection kits:**

eSwab™ collection kits for throat swabs:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-bulletin-change-from-nasopharyngeal-throat-swab-for-covid-19-and-rpp-testing.pdf>

NP swab/UTM and APTIMA® collection kits:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-bulletin-major-changes-in-covid-19-specimen-collection-recommendations.pdf>

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**ADDENDUM: Throat collection instructions for respiratory viruses**

1. Various collection containers and colored media may be provided to your site. Throat swabs will have a shaft with a continuous thickness. NP swabs have a narrower flexible end and the swab head is smaller than the throat swab. Due to limited supply inventories, the swabs and tubes provided may differ. At the time of writing collection kits may include:
  - Polyester or cotton-tipped swab (it may not have a breakpoint and require scissors decontaminated with 70% alcohol between samples or twisting to break the handle) with sterile saline media
  - Copan eSwab™ with eSwab™ media
  - APTIMA® Multitest or Unisex Collection Kits (only for COVID-19 testing and only assessment centres)
2. Store products at room temperature.
3. 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 (throat)
  - 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
4. Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as per protocol for collection of COVID-19 NP samples.

5. Explain procedure to the patient.

6. Collect throat swab. VIGOROUSLY swab the areas highlighted in the figure. Swabbing may activate the gag reflex.

7. 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. **IF USING APTIMA® TUBES, DO NOT FORCE THE SWAB THROUGH OR DO NOT PUNCTURE THE FOIL CAP (APTIMA® kits are to be used only assessment centres).**

8. Discard the top portion of the shaft. Tightly screw the cap onto the tube.

9. Place tube in biohazard bag. Place requisition in pouch outside of the bag.

10. Refrigerate tubes or store on ice if possible. If no refrigeration available, store at room temperature and ship to the lab within 48 hours.

Throat Swab Specimen Collection

