

Strengthening laboratory practices in the face of COVID 19

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COLLECTION AND TRANSPORT OF SPECIMENS
FROM PATIENTS/PERSONS IN THE COMMUNITY SUSPECTED OF
COVID-19

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**INSTRUCTIONS FOR COLLECTION AND TRANSPORT OF SPECIMENS
FROM PATIENTS / PERSONS IN THE COMMUNITY SUSPECTED OF
COVID-19**

All specimens collected for laboratory investigations should be regarded as potentially infectious. Health care workers collecting, handling, or transporting clinical specimens should adhere to standard precautions and practices to minimise probable exposure to COVID-19.

General instructions

- Perform hand hygiene before and after the procedure and after contact with respiratory secretions.
- HCWs should refrain from touching eyes, nose or mouth with potentially contaminated gloves or hands

Collection of specimens for RT PCR

- Specimen collection should be done in a well-ventilated, dedicated place away from the public area.
- All individuals should be placed at least 2 m apart while waiting for the test.
- Ensure that all patients cover their nose and mouth with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing. Offer a surgical mask to patients while they are in waiting/public areas.
- Brief history of the illness is mandatory. Patient information (age, sex, address), clinical features / duration / treatment, travel history and date of arrival, co-morbid factors if any, date and time of sample collection, sample type/s and other laboratory investigations should be recorded.
- Ensure that health care workers who collect specimens use adequate PPE following the steps of proper donning and doffing.
 - Gown
 - Plastic apron
 - Cap
 - N95 respirator
 - Eye protection (i.e. goggles or a face shield)
 - Gloves
- The type of the sample to be collected is determined depending on the clinical presentation of the patients.

- Samples
 - Nasopharyngeal swabs in viral transport medium (VTM)
 - Oropharyngeal (throat) swab in VTM
 - Sputum in sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap container with VTM / 1ml N saline
- Label the specimen properly and dispatch to the laboratory as soon as possible. If not, refrigerate at 4°C until dispatched to the laboratory.
- Perform hand hygiene after contact with the patient and his or her surroundings and after PPE removal.
- Disinfect work areas with 0.1% sodium hypochlorite and decontaminate spills with 1% sodium hypochlorite solution.
- Proper removal of PPE is as important as proper wearing of the PPE to avoid self contamination
- Remove PPE and dispose to an infectious waste bag (double bags) and send for incineration.

Transporting of specimens to the laboratory

- Transport the samples to testing laboratory as soon as possible with ice (4°C). If any delay, samples can be stored at refrigerator (4°C) up to 48 hours. Do not freeze.
- Ensure that personnel who transport specimens are trained in safe handling practices and spill decontamination procedures.
- Transport the samples in triple package to ensure the requirements in the national or international regulations for the transport of dangerous goods (infectious substances).
- State the full name, age, travel history, clinical symptoms of the patient and the type of specimen clearly on the accompanying request form.
- Notify the laboratory as soon as possible that the specimen is being transported.
- Wear gloves and masks when transporting specimens in the triple package as shown in Figure 1.
- Several samples can be sent in the same triple package.
- Always transport the specimens in upright position.

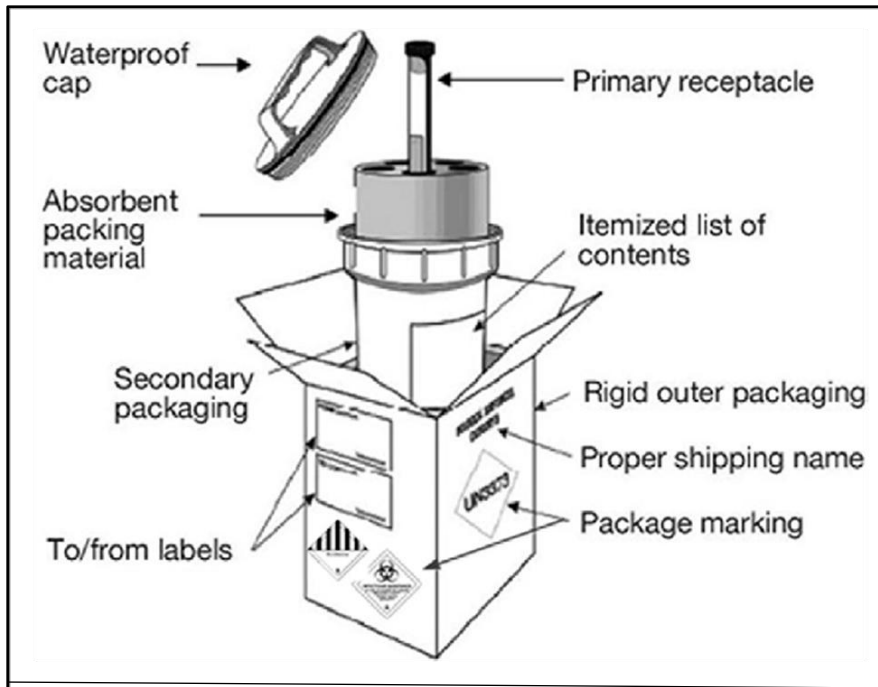


Figure 1. Example of triple packaging

Waste disposal/decontamination

- All waste should be collected into an infectious waste bin with a yellow bag.
- Waste should be sent directly for incineration. Communicate with the staff in charge of the incinerator when sending waste.
- Cleaning agents and disinfectants
 - Clean all surfaces, frequently touched surfaces and floors, with 0.1 % sodium hypochlorite. For any spillages use 1% sodium hypochlorite solution.
 - Alcohol (e.g. isopropyl 70%, ethyl alcohol 60%) can be used to wipe down surfaces where the use of bleach is not suitable, e.g. metal.

References

- Laboratory testing for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in suspected human cases. Interim guidance. WHO.19 March 2020
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- Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). CDC. Summary of Recent Changes. March 21, 2020.
- Ministry of Health In collaboration with Ceylon College of Physicians Coordinated by Epidemiology Unit. Provisional Clinical Practice Guidelines on COVID-19 suspected and confirmed patients. March 2020.