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Laboratory Medicine Directorate Department: Microbiology ID code: SOPMEX00100	Title: A Patient's Guide to the Collection of Specimens for Microbiological Investigation- Leaflet	Issue date: July 2025 Review date: July 2027
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A PATIENT'S GUIDE TO THE COLLECTION OF SPECIMENS FOR MICROBIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

FAECES

Use a blue lid universal specimen container for the following investigations



Faeces / Stool samples

Whilst collecting the faeces sample try not to collect urine or water from the toilet with the faeces sample but do not worry if you do. Place something in the toilet to catch the faeces, such as a potty or empty plastic food container. Alternatively, you could spread several layers of toilet paper across the toilet bowl securing this by wrapping each end around the toilet seat, or clean newspaper or plastic wrap over the rim of the toilet. Try to make sure the sample does not touch the inside of the toilet.

Use the scoop attached to the inside of the lid of the blue specimen container to place the faecal material into the pot, until it is about a third full. If mucus, blood or pus is present in the faeces include portions of these in the sample taken. Screw the lid shut leaving the scoop attached to the lid.

Ensure each pot is tightly sealed and clearly labelled with your name, date of birth and hospital number and the sample type and date collected. If you have been given a preprinted label, please make sure this is firmly stuck to the container. Place the sample container in a plastic specimen bag and seal fully.

If you are sending the sample in the post follow the instructions for “**Sending in samples by post**”, on the back page of this booklet.

N.B Please note if direct transport/postage of faeces sample to the lab is not carried out then please ensure the sample is refrigerated but ensure it is dispatched the next day.

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URINE SAMPLE

Use a wide-mouthed 60ml universal specimen container for the following investigations



Mid-Stream Urines (MSU)

1. Wash your hands before entering the toilet cubicle.
2. Prepare to urinate into the toilet and have the urine container ready to access.
3. Women should part the labia and men should retract the foreskin where appropriate.
4. Allow the first flow of your urine to enter the toilet bowl.
5. Then stop urinating and collect the middle flow of your urine into the specimen pot.
6. Void the last part of your urine flow into the toilet.
7. Ensure the urine pot cap is screwed on tightly and that the pot is not leaking.
8. Check that your name, date of birth, hospital number and description of the sample (MSU), including the date the sample was taken are on the pot. If you have been given a preprinted label, please make sure this is firmly stuck to the container.
9. Put the urine sample into the plastic specimen bag provided and seal.
10. Wash your hands before leaving the toilet.
11. Immediately deliver the urine sample to the sample drop-off area in outpatients.

N.B Please note if direct transport of urine samples to the outpatients department or to the lab is not carried out then please ensure the urine sample is refrigerated, but ensure it is dispatched the next day.

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SPUTUM

Use a wide-mouthed 60ml universal specimen container for the following investigations



Sputum (for Culture & Sensitivity (C&S))

A sputum (or phlegm) sample is a thick mucus sample that is expectorated (coughed up) from the chest when you have a deep cough; it is usually thick and sticky and may be colourless, white, yellow or green.. Sputum is not saliva or spit, which is clear and runny. You do not want to collect saliva in your sputum sample. The sputum sample should ideally be collected first thing in the morning, before eating.

The sample of sputum should be expectorated (coughed) into a wide-mouthed universal container and the silver cap sealed tightly. Aim to produce one teaspoonful amount, but it is OK if this is not possible.

Ensure the pot is clearly labelled with your name, date of birth and hospital number and the sample type and date collected. If you have been given a preprinted label, please make sure this is firmly stuck to the container.

If you are sending the sample in the post follow the instructions for “**Sending in samples by post**”, on the back page of this booklet.

Sputum (for AFB investigation)

Collect an early morning deep cough sputum sample into a separate wide-mouthed universal container on 3 consecutive mornings.

Ensure each pot is tightly sealed and clearly labelled with your name, date of birth and hospital number and the sample type and date collected. If you have been given a preprinted label, please make sure this is firmly stuck to the container.

If you are sending the sample in the post follow the instructions for “**Sending in samples by post**”, on the back page of this booklet. **N.B Please note if direct transport/postage of sputum samples to the lab is not carried out then please ensure the samples are refrigerated but ensure it is dispatched the next day.**

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SENDING IN SAMPLES BY POST

If you are required to send in a specimen you will be given a specimen postal box



Samples sent into the lab by post MUST be sent in accordance with statutory standard legal safety regulations and they MUST be packaged as detailed below.

1/ Ensure sample container lid is sealed tightly and is not leaking. Check that the sample container is labelled with your name, date of birth, hospital number and the type of sample (e.g. sputum) and the date the sample was taken.

2/ Wrap the sample up in some strips of cotton wool or paper towels and sellotape the padding around the sample.

3/ Place the padded sample into the plastic mini-grip bag provided and clip seal it.

4/ Place the mini-grip bag into the plastic cylinder container provided and screw cap the lid onto it tightly.

5/ Place the plastic container into the cardboard box provided and also put your specimen request form given to you by the hospital (if you have one) into the cardboard box.

6/ Close the flaps on the cardboard box and sellotape it shut so that it is securely sealed.

7/ Ensure that the delivery address label for the “Microbiology Laboratory” at the Royal Brompton Hospital, Sydney Street, London, is fixed to the side of the box.

8/ Take the sample to your local post office for dispatch.