

# COVID-19 RT-PCR Specimen Collection and Handling

**Purpose:** To provide guidance on specimen collection and handling for rapid, urgent, and routine RT-PCR testing.

Priority Type	Location	Turn-around Time (TAT)	Biohazard Bag Color	Send to:
<b>RAPID (LABSTATCOV2)</b>	L&D	2 hours	Orange (regular)	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
<b>RAPID (<a href="#">Downtime Requisition Form</a>)</b>	All other areas	2 hours	Orange (regular)	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
<b>URGENT (LABSARSCOV2)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inpatient</li> <li>*Pre-op</li> </ul>	4-6 hours	Green *Pre-op: orange dots if next day surgery	ED Alpha, P-tube #446
	Occ Health	4-6 hours	Red	ED Alpha, P-tube #446
<b>ROUTINE (LABSARSCOV2)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inpatient</li> <li>Pre-op</li> </ul>	24-72 hours	Orange (regular)	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
	Occ Health	24-72 hours	Blue	Clinical Lab, P-tube #222
	Ambulatory	24-72 hours	Orange (regular)	300P Clinical Lab, F17 window

**ED must refer to ED COVID-19 testing algorithm**

## Special Instructions for RAPID Testing

### Indications for RAPID

- Critically ill patients and/or likely ICU admission
- ED/transfer patients needing to go to OR or other dedicated procedure room within 6-8 hours including trauma 99s/Code STEMI
- Labor and delivery in actively laboring moms
- Same day admit patients unable to get a pre-admission test
- Ambulatory patients undergoing aerosol generating procedure with no previous result

### Requisition Order for RAPID

For patient with previous COVID-19 testing result – a repeat test within 3 days prior to procedure is NOT required. Recent results needed for discharge to skilled nursing facility should use the non-rapid test with an expected result time of 6 hours. Providers who want to continue ordering the RAPID test when clinically justified can fill out a downtime requisition and send it with the sample.

>> [Complete Downtime Requisition Form](#)

- Indicate physician name, collection date/time, source, symptomatic or asymptomatic, and LABSTATCOV2 in "OTHER"

## Specimen Requirements

**Preferred:** Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab

**Acceptable:** Nares or nasal mid-turbinate swab (consider for patients with contraindication or concern with obtaining NP swab)  
Nasal wash and aspirates in sterile container  
Bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) in sterile container (Urgent or Routine only)

**Container:** 2-3 mL of viral transport medium or saline (blue top media vial). Always check expiration date before use.

**Specimen Stability:** Up to 72 hours at 2-8°C

**Swab Collection Guidelines:** NP Collection [COVID-19 Nasopharyngeal Specimen Collection One Point Lesson](#)  
NMT Collection [COVID-19 Nasal mid turbinate \(NMT\) swab collection](#)