

Personal protective equipment (PPE) for the collection of naso/oropharyngeal or nasal swabs specimens – COVID-19

August 2023

This guidance is based on infection prevention and control best practice with regards to Standard and Transmission-based Precautions¹.

The wearing of PPE is to mitigate infectious risk posed to the healthcare worker during close proximity when collecting a nasopharyngeal, oropharyngeal or nasal swabs for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or rapid antigen testing (RAT).

Always perform hand hygiene² when donning, doffing and disposal of PPE³. Sessional use of PPE is recommended where possible (see further below).			
Action/What/Where	PPE	General advice	Sessional use of PPE⁴
Undertaking multiple or singular PCR or RAT tests – outdoor areas, indoor, close confined spaces	- P2/N95 particulate respirator - Eye protection - Gloves	- Use a well ventilated space - Stand slightly to the side of person (not directly in front of them) when taking the swab - Advise person to pull mask down to just under their nose - Take swab - Move away when the procedure is completed - Advise person to pull mask back up to cover nose	P2/N95 particulate respirators, eye protection⁵ can be worn for the duration of a session – change if damp, contaminated. Gloves – these must be changed between each person encounter and hand hygiene performed before donning new gloves.

Note: Use of protective items such as a disposable gown or apron can be worn if there is a risk of exposure to blood or other body fluids.

¹ See information on Standard and Transmission-based Precautions: [Infection prevention and control](#)

² See information and resources for hand hygiene: [Hand hygiene guidance](#)

³ See donning and doffing guidance: [COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendations for health and disability care worker](#)

⁴ See information on sessional use: [COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendations for health and disability care worker](#)

⁵ Face shield, safety glasses or goggles (can be re-processed and reused) – prescription glasses are not classed as eye protection

COVID-19 Instructions on specimen collection

This guidance provides additional information on how to take nasopharyngeal swabs, and oropharyngeal and anterior nasal specimens for COVID-19.

A **nasopharyngeal swab** (use swabs with flexible shafts) placed into a viral transport media (VTM) will obtain the optimal specimen and is the preferred collection method for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing due to its higher sensitivity in detecting the virus.

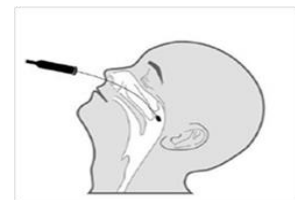
An **oropharyngeal** with an **anterior nasal swab** (use swabs with more rigid shafts) may be considered for use by health practitioners as an alternate swab if someone is experiencing problems receiving the nasopharyngeal swab.

The swab manufacturer may vary by region – please consult with your local pathology provider as to which swab type to use.

Preferred Option – Nasopharyngeal Collection

Instructions for symptomatic and asymptomatic testing performed by a trained healthcare provider.

1. Wash or sanitise hands using an alcohol- based hand sanitiser.
2. Put on P2/N95 particulate respirator and eye protection.
3. Using a synthetic fibre-tipped flexible shaft nasopharyngeal swab, insert swab into one nostril.
4. For adequate collection the swab tip must extend well beyond the anterior nares until some resistance is met –(see diagram 1).
5. Rotate the swab several times to collect cellular material from the mucosal surface.
6. Break swab into the VTM provided. Ensure there is no leakage.
7. Label specimen correctly including patients full name, date of birth, NHI number and collection time and date.
8. Wash or sanitise hands again.



Alternative Option – Oropharyngeal (Throat) and Anterior Nasal

Instructions for collecting combined oropharyngeal and nasal specimen for symptomatic and asymptomatic testing performed by a trained healthcare provider.

1. Follow steps 1 and 2 as above.
2. Push tongue down and out the way using a tongue depressor.
3. Rub swab over the posterior pharynx and bilateral tonsillar pillars.
4. Rub swab over both tonsillar pillars and posterior oropharynx and avoid touching the tongue, teeth, and gums.
5. Using same swab, insert (approx. 1cm) into the anterior nares (rotate swab several times, repeat for the other nostril).
6. Place swab, tip first, into the transport tube provided.
7. Label specimen correctly including patients full name, date of birth, NHI number and collection time and date.
8. Wash or sanitise hands again.

