

Specimen collection in residential care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic

This factsheet describes how to test residents for COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. For more information about COVID-19 testing, including details of who should be tested, refer to the [COVID-19 National Guidelines for Residential Care Facilities](#).

What tests are needed?

- In most cases, residents of residential care facilities who have fever or respiratory symptoms should be tested for both COVID-19 and a full respiratory panel.

What swab types can be used?

- A **combined throat and bilateral deep nasal swab**, using the same swab, is recommended for COVID-19 and other respiratory virus testing.¹
- Different swab types are suitable for collecting swabs for COVID-19 and respiratory panel testing (see below).



Flocked swab, fine stem



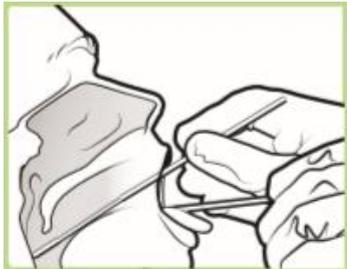
Flocked swab, medium stem

¹ Where testing for pertussis (whooping cough) is requested by a patient's GP, a [nasopharyngeal swab](#) is required and should be collected by someone trained to collect a nasopharyngeal swab.

Preparing to collect the specimen

Step 1: Put on personal protective equipment (PPE)*	
Step 2: Label the swab tube/container clearly with resident’s full name, date of birth, and date and time of collection. If the label is not clear, it will need to be recollected.	
<p>Step 3: Ensure that all details are completed on the pathology request form</p> <p><i>For fastest turnaround time, use the dedicated ACT Pathology COVID request form for your facility² when sending specimens to ACT Pathology. This form will need to be printed and filled in correctly. Please ensure the facility name, address and fax number on the form are correct.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient’s first and last name • Sex and date of birth • Name and address of aged care facility (if not pre-printed on the form) • Medicare number • Tests requested: COVID-19 and respiratory panel • Public Health Outbreak Number (if applicable) • Clinical notes: include details of symptoms and that the patient is an aged care resident • Requesting doctor’s name and contact details. • Resident’s usual GP (if different to above) • Name and signature of person collecting sample • If sending to ACT Pathology: resident or facility mobile phone number if a SMS result is desired (for negative results only) 	

Collecting the specimen

Step 4: Enter the resident’s room	
<p>Step 5: Explain the procedure to the resident and ensure they are as comfortable as possible. Encourage the resident to maintain a slow, steady breathing pattern. If possible, have the resident confirm their details on the swab tube/container.</p>	
<p>Step 6: Position yourself to collect the specimen. Stand slightly to the side of the resident, to avoid respiratory secretions if they cough or sneeze.</p>	
<p>Step 7: Perform oropharyngeal (throat) swab</p> <p>Swab the tonsil beds and the back of the throat, avoiding the tongue. Rotate the swab several times prior to withdrawing it.</p>	<p>Step 8: Perform bilateral deep nasal swab</p> <p>With the same swab, using a pencil grip and gently rotating, insert the tip 2-3 cm (or until there is resistance) into the nostril, parallel to the palate. Rotate the swab several times against the nasal wall. Withdraw and repeat in the other nostril.</p>
	
<p>Images courtesy of Public Health Laboratory Network</p>	

² Contact Customer Services at ACT Pathology on (02) 5124 3367 or (02) 5124 2932 (08:30-17:00 Monday-Friday) if there are any changes to the address or fax number or you require your facility’s form to be resent to you.

After collecting the specimen

Step 9: Prepare swab to send to the laboratory

- Place swab into the tube (you may need to break the end of the swab) and ensure the lid is secured to avoid leakage.
- Place the tube in the pathology bag with the pathology request form and seal the bag. **For fastest turnaround time, use a red “urgent” biohazard bags if sending to ACT Pathology.**
- Remove gloves
- Perform hand hygiene
- Don a pair of clean gloves
- Wipe the pathology bag down with disinfectant wipes and place the bag just outside the room.

Step 10: Remove PPE*

Step 11: Arrange for the specimen to be collected by a courier or delivered to a pathology collection centre on the day of collection (see details below). Refrigerate the sample until it is until it is sent to the laboratory. Do NOT freeze the specimen.

Receiving results

ACT Pathology

- Results for specimens sent to ACT Pathology are expected within 12 hours of receipt in the laboratory.
- Negative results will be provided to the facility via fax and the requesting doctor via the usual process.
- If the resident or facility mobile number is provided, the result will be sent by SMS (for negative results only).
- All positive results are notified via telephone to ACT Health who will urgently contact the RACF.

Other pathology providers

- Turnaround time may vary but results should be received within 24-48 hours of being received in the laboratory.
- Negative results will be provided via the usual process for that laboratory.
- All positive results are notified via telephone to ACT Health who will urgently contact the RACF.

Obtaining supplies

- Swab and bag supplies can be requested through Customer Services at ACT Pathology on (02) 5124 3367 or (02) 5124 2932 (08:30-17:00 Monday-Friday).

Arranging specimen transport to the laboratory

- The preferred pathology provider is ACT Pathology, for fastest turnaround time. Specimens can also be sent to Capital Pathology. Ensure that the test is marked **URGENT** on the request form.
- Alert CDC at ACT Health on (02) 5124 9213 or (02) 9962 4155 after business hours.

- Details on how to arrange specimen transport are in the table below.

Specimen transport to ACT Pathology		
Business hours	Monday to Friday 8:30–17:00	Contact customer services to organise courier pick-up on (02) 5124 3367 or (02) 5124 2932.
Weekend hours	Saturday and Sunday 14:00-17:00	Contact on-call Customer Services on 0418 409 480. <i>Courier pickup time will be dependent on availability.</i> Alternatively, facilities can organise direct drop-off to ACT Pathology (see below).
All hours	24/7	Facilities can directly drop-off to ACT Pathology at Canberra Hospital Specimen Reception (Building 10, Level 2 ph. 5124 2930). Alternatively, a taxi service can be used to transport the specimen. The taxi driver needs to be informed and use hand sanitiser after handling the bag/box. Specimens MUST be packaged in a small insulated bag/box for transportation to the pathology laboratory
Specimen transport to Capital Pathology		
Business hours	Monday to Friday 8:00–18:00	Contact (02) 6285 9877 for courier pick-up.
After hours	Saturday 8:30–16:00 Sunday 9:00–15:00	

* It is crucial to put on (don) and remove (doff) PPE safely, in order to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. For instructions on how to safely don and doff PPE, please refer to the following resources:

- [ACT Health factsheet](#) on donning and doffing PPE
- [Department of Health video](#) on PPE for aged care facility staff

Accessibility

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like an alternative format, please phone 13 22 81.



If English is not your first language and you need the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), please call 13 14 50.

For further accessibility information, visit: www.health.act.gov.au/accessibility

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