

Sputum Collection for AFB Microbiology

Sputum versus saliva/spittle

Sputum is examined under the microscope to enable the laboratory to see any bacteria (germs) which may be causing a respiratory infection. The laboratory also "cultures" the sputum to grow any bacteria causing infection.

Sputum is produced in the lungs and large air passages as the body tries to kill the invading bacteria (and other organisms). Sputum has to be coughed up.

Saliva or spittle is formed in the mouth and is white and frothy. When you collect your sputum, sputum coughed up from deep within the lungs should be collected, and not spittle or saliva from your mouth.

Collecting the sputum

- You may be given 1-3 sputum collection containers, depending on the test your doctor requires. These should be labelled with your full name and date of birth for identification. If three (3) specimens are requested, use a separate container on each of three consecutive mornings.
- For each specimen, upon waking clear your throat of any material which may have accumulated in your mouth overnight and discard it. Clean your teeth and rinse out your mouth but do not eat until you have collected the sputum specimen.
- Cough deeply several times during the first hour you are awake. If you have difficulty coughing, inhale deeply several times. It is important to collect the specimen from the lungs and not the mouth.
- Do not use tissues to collect the sample but deposit the sputum directly into the container. Label either with the date collected (preferable) or 1, 2, and 3 as you use them. Screw down the lid tightly (please make sure it doesn't leak), then seal the container in the provided specimen transport bag. Store it in the refrigerator until you have collected all the required samples. Do not freeze the specimen.
- When you have collected the last sample, bring it and the previous samples with the form (in one of the transport bags) to any of the Mater Pathology collection centres.

Results

The results of the test will be sent back to your doctor. It will take at least three (3) days before initial results are available. Some final results may take up to eight (10) weeks depending on the test requested.

Questions or problems

If you have any questions or problems feel free to ask one of the collection staff or your own doctor.

For further information, please telephone Mater Pathology on 07 3163 8500 or your local centre during business hours. Mater Pathology Collection Centre information and opening hours are available at pathology.mater.org.au

Collection centre: _____

Telephone number: _____