

SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Testing Guidance & FAQs for Clinicians

VUMC has the capability to test patients for COVID-19. The following is recommended:

- Test patients with acute onset lower respiratory tract infection symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath). Presence of isolated upper respiratory symptoms (sore throat, congestion, runny nose) alone should not lead to testing, even if patient has contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case.
- **Do not test** asymptomatic patients.
- Assess for other respiratory virus infections (such as influenza).
- Because early reports from China indicated a co-infection rate of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses of ~6%, the Tennessee Department of Health currently recommends testing patients even if other viral tests are positive.

How is the test ordered?

Testing does not require approval by Infection Prevention. The name of the test in eStar is "SARS-CoV-2 PCR."

What types of specimens do I need to collect?

Collect a nasopharyngeal (NP) and oropharyngeal (OP) swab with separate swabs. Then place both swabs into the same container of viral transport media. These are the same swabs/media utilized for Respiratory Pathogen Panels. In eStar, select the specimen type of "Other." After 3.11.2020 use "NP/OP" option.



How should a swab for COVID-19 testing be collected?

For nasopharyngeal swabs, insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate. For a best practice video visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVJNWefmHjE>. Leave the swab in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions.

For oropharyngeal swabs (e.g., throat swab), swab the posterior pharynx, avoiding the tongue. Those collecting the swab should wear the recommended PPE for COVID-19 suspects (gown, gloves, surgical mask and eye protection).

How should the specimen be transported to lab?

Seal the closed specimen-container within a 95kPa biohazard transport bag. If such as bag is unavailable, double-bag the specimen within traditional specimen transport bags. Place the bagged specimen within a hard styrofoam container, with a cold pack. For patients on-site at VUMC, hand deliver the specimen to the Clinical Microbiology Laboratory in 4524 TVC. For off-site clinic patients, specimens should be delivered directly to 4525 TVC by courier. The clinics should store the specimen in a refrigerator until the courier arrives.

How is SARS-CoV-2 testing performed at VUMC?

This qualitative test is based upon PCR amplification and detection of viral nucleic acid. The reagents and methods of the SARS-CoV-2 test at VUMC specifically emulate the assay developed by the CDC for US public health laboratories.

Can we send tests for other respiratory viruses, like the respiratory pathogen panel?

Yes, the same swabs collected for COVID-19 testing can be used for the Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP) testing (you do not need to send separate swabs).