

Sputum Collection

Your doctor has requested a sputum test and the laboratory requires a specimen of inflammatory secretions (phlegm), which has been coughed up from the lungs and lower air passages.

This sputum is usually thick and opaque, and may vary in colour (grey, green or yellow). Thin, watery saliva is not suitable for testing.

If chest physiotherapy treatment is being given, it is preferable for the physiotherapist to help collect a suitable sample.

If at home, it may be useful to arrange pillows over the side of a bed and lie on them head downwards for about 10 minutes to drain the sputum from the lungs. The most adequate sample may be obtained early in the morning on rising.

Rinsing the mouth out with water first may make the collection easier, especially if the throat is dry and the sputum is very sticky.

A deep breath in, followed by a strong cough, will help to carry the sputum into your throat. You can then cough the specimen into the container provided.

If the sample appears thin and watery with food particles, it is saliva. Please obtain another sterile container from a QML Pathology collection centre and collect again.

If you are unable to get the sample to a QML Pathology collection centre on the day the specimen is produced, please refrigerate it.

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