

May 5, 2020

General Guidance for Handling Bulk-Packaged Sterile Swabs Properly for Upper Respiratory Sample Collection During the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic

Sterile swabs for upper respiratory specimen collection may be packaged in one of two ways:

- Individually wrapped (preferred when possible)
- Bulk packaged

Bulk-packaged swabs may be used for sample collection; however, care must be exercised to avoid SARS-CoV-2 contamination of any of the swabs in the bulk-packaged container.

- Before engaging with patients and while wearing a clean set of protective gloves, distribute individual swabs from the bulk container into individual disposable plastic bags.
- If bulk-packaged swabs cannot be individually packaged:
 - Use only fresh, clean gloves to retrieve a single new swab from the bulk container.
 - Close the bulk swab container after each swab removal and leave it closed when not in use to avoid inadvertent contamination.
 - Store opened packages in a closed, airtight container to minimize contamination.
 - Keep all used swabs away from the bulk swab container to avoid contamination.
- As with all swabs, only grasp the swab by the distal end of the handle, using gloved hands only.
- When patients are self-collecting their swabs under clinical supervision:
 - Hand a swab to the patient only while wearing a clean set of protective gloves.
 - The patient can then self-swab and place the swab in transport media or sterile transport device and seal.
 - If the patient needs assistance, you can help the patient place the swab into transport media or a transport device and seal it.