



Anterior Nasal (Nares) Specimen Collection for SARS-CoV-2 Diagnostic Testing

Anterior Nasal Specimen

- Anterior nasal (nares) sampling is less invasive and generally results in less patient discomfort than sampling from other upper respiratory anatomical sites.
- Testing for the presence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can be performed using anterior nasal specimens provided the specimen is collected properly.
- [Healthcare providers](#) should be trained to collect anterior nasal specimens, in addition to other [acceptable specimens](#) depending on the authorized SARS-CoV-2 viral test used.
- Collection of anterior nasal specimens can decrease the risk of exposure to healthcare providers by (1) reducing the duration of the procedure, (2) reducing coughing and sneezing induced by specimen collection, and (3) instructing the patient how to perform self-collection in a healthcare setting.
- It is recommended that healthcare providers provide visual (written or video) step-by-step instructions, in addition to verbal instructions, to patients who are self-collecting anterior nasal samples in a healthcare setting for SARS-CoV-2 testing. See FDA's [Recommendations on Providing Clear Instructions to Patients Who Self-Collect an Anterior Nasal \(Nares\) Sample in a Health Care Setting for SARS-CoV-2 Testing - Letter to Health Care Providers](#).
- Anterior nasal self-collection may reduce personal protective equipment (PPE) use, given that the patient can perform self-collection under supervision (versus the healthcare provider performing the collection). See the following section for PPE recommendations.
- The procedure for anterior nasal sampling is as follows:
 - For self-collection, provide hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol or access for the patient to wash their hands with soap and water and then dry them thoroughly. This will prevent the patient from contaminating surfaces as they exit.
 - Using a flocked or spun polyester swab, insert the entire absorbent tip of the swab (usually ½ to ¾ of an inch (1 to 1.5 cm) inside the nostril and firmly sample the nasal wall by rotating the swab in a circular path against the nasal wall at least 4 times.
 - Take approximately 15 seconds to accomplish this action. Be sure to collect any nasal drainage that may be present on the swab. Sample both nostrils with the same swab. Simply twirling the swab against one part of the inside of the nose or leaving the swab in the nose for 15 seconds is not a proper technique and may result in an insufficient sample.

Protective Practices for Healthcare Providers Performing or Observing Anterior Nasal Specimen Collection in a Healthcare Setting

- For healthcare providers obtaining anterior nasal specimens or working within six (6) feet of patients self-collecting to test for suspected SARS-CoV-2 infection in a healthcare setting:
 - Maintain proper infection control and use recommended personal protective equipment (PPE), which includes an N95 or higher-level respirator (or facemask if a respirator is not available), eye protection, gloves, and a gown.
 - Specimen collection should be performed in a normal examination room with the door closed.
- For healthcare providers in the room who are observing patient self-collection of anterior nasal specimens, and are handling specimens but not directly involved in the collection and **not working** within six (6) feet of the patient:
 - Maintain proper infection control and use recommended personal protective equipment

(PPE), which includes an N95 or higher-level respirator (or facemask if a respirator is not available), eye protection, gloves, and a gown.

Protective Practices for Healthcare Providers Observing Anterior Nasal Specimen Collection in an Outdoor Setting

- For healthcare providers who are observing patient self-collection outdoors, follow [Standard Precautions](#).
 - Gloves are recommended and may be required based on a site-specific risk assessment. Note that healthcare personnel are recommended to wear a form of source control (facemask) at all times.
 - PPE use may be minimized through patient self-collection based on a site-specific risk assessment. Note that healthcare providers who are observing patient self-collection outdoors should maintain at least six (6) feet of separation.

For Additional Information

- [FDA FAQs on Diagnostic Testing for SARS-CoV-2](#)
- [CDC Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [CDC Laboratory Biosafety and COVID-19: Questions and Answers](#)
- [CDC Instructions on How to Collect Your Anterior Nasal Swab Sample for COVID-19 Testing](#)
- [Recommendations on Providing Clear Instructions to Patients Who Self-Collect an Anterior Nasal \(Nares\) Sample in a Health Care Setting for SARS-CoV-2 Testing - Letter to Health Care Providers](#)