

California COVID-19 Testing Task Force

Specimen Collection Options April 24, 2020

Collecting a specimen for COVID-19 testing can be done in a number of ways. For traditional polymerase chain reaction testing, commonly referred to as the “PCR” test, a specimen is generally collected from the back of the nose (nasopharyngeal). Specimens may be collected from other locations, such as the nostril (anterior nares or mid-turbinate) or throat (oropharyngeal).

According to the FDA, nasopharyngeal specimens are preferred for COVID-19 testing and specimens collected from nostril or throat are acceptable. We do not have enough information at this time on the use of other types of specimens (including tongue, cheek, or saliva).

Specimens should not be collected using calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden handles, as these can inhibit PCR testing.

For more information on specimen collection, please refer to the [FDA FAQs](#).

Transport Media

Viral or universal transport media (VTM/UTM) is the preferred transport media. Other options include liquid Amies media, and transport in saline. For more information, please refer to the [FDA FAQs](#).