

# How to provide a sputum sample



## Information for patients

This information sheet answers some of the questions you may have about how to provide a sputum sample, from obtaining the sample to submitting it for testing. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the doctors or nurses caring for you.

A sputum sample, or a sample of your phlegm/mucus, should be collected in the morning. To make sure the sample is not contaminated, wash and dry your hands and keep the lid on the pot until you are ready. If you have eaten or drunk anything, rinse your mouth with water before completing the sample.

If you are completing samples to check for tuberculosis or atypical infections, with a 'Sputum -TB' test, then you will be asked to provide 3 samples on different days. They can be provided at the same time as a 'Sputum C&S' test. The type of sputum sample you are providing can be read on the pot label.



## Loosening sputum from your chest

Sometimes it can be difficult to cough up sputum. There are some exercises, called 'chest clearance exercises' that can help loosen your sputum. If you have never done these types of exercises before, it is best to be sitting, and take breaks as needed.

Start by taking a slow long deep breath in. When your chest is completely full, see if you can hold your breath for 3 seconds. Then relax and exhale. See if you can repeat this 3 or 4 times. This may be enough to loosen sputum for you.

You can also try a 'huff' after the deep breaths. This involves taking a slightly deeper breath in than normal, and then quickly exhaling as if you are trying to steam up a mirror.



## Producing the sample

1. Complete the chest clearance exercises or wait until you are ready to cough up sputum.
2. Cough into the pot. Please be aware you will need an amount of sputum at least the size of your little fingernail.
3. Place the lid on the pot and tightly close it.
4. Make sure the pot has the correct label on it – a label with a barcode and your name, hospital number and date of birth.
5. Place the pot in the specimen bag.
6. Place in the fridge until you are ready to drop off.

## Dropping off the sample to your GP

Ensure the sample is labelled, the bottle is sealed and it is placed in a specimen bag. Your sample should be dropped off as soon as possible to your GP, ideally before midday. If this is not possible, contact your GP surgery to ask what time the courier comes to collect samples. If you miss the collection, the sample will not be suitable to get tested.

## Dropping off the sample to King's College Hospital

Ensure the sample is labelled, the bottle is sealed and it is placed in a specimen bag. Your sample should be dropped off as soon as possible within 24 hours of the sample being produced.

The sample collection box is available on the ground floor of the Golden Jubilee wing in Suite 3. As you enter Suite 3 the collection box is at the entrance on a trolley. Please ensure your sample is dropped off before 4.30pm to ensure it is collected that day.

## Who to contact?

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact the Integrated Respiratory Team (details on page 4) or your consultant's secretary.



Integrated Respiratory Team tel: 020 3299 6531

Available Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm and Saturday and Sunday, 8am to midday.

## Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **[kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)**

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email [kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net)**