



# Patient Instructions for Sputum Collection

- Sputum is the mucous or phlegm coughed-up *from your lungs*. It is **not saliva** or mucous from the back of the throat or mucous from your nose.
- Sputum specimens are best if coughed up first thing in the morning, *after* you have been sleeping at night.
- Normally, you will be asked to produce one sputum specimen each morning for three mornings in a row. However, you should follow the verbal instructions given to you at the clinic/office as this may be different for different patients.
- To collect a specimen, you will be given a plastic tube(s) with a green screw-cap lid and a plastic specimen bag(s). Use one tube for each day, if you are told to collect multiple specimens over a number of days.
- About a teaspoon of sputum is the amount that is needed.

The collection tube is sterile (very clean). Do not open the tube until you are ready to use it. Avoid touching the inside of the tube or lid when you are using it.

## Procedure:

Go away from other people - either outside or beside an open window - before collecting the specimen. This helps protect other people from germs when you cough. Take the plastic collection tube with you - but don't open it until you are ready to use it.

1. VERY IMPORTANT: Before you collect a sample of sputum, brush your teeth/dentures well and gargle with water (*not* mouthwash) to rinse-out your mouth. Do not eat, drink or smoke before collecting the sputum.
2. Take a deep breath through your mouth and hold it for a moment then cough to bring-up sputum from deep in your chest. You may need to take several deep breaths and do lots of coughing to produce an adequate sample.  
Tip: If you cannot cough-up sputum, try breathing steam from a hot shower or a pan of boiling water.
3. Open the collection tube and hold it close to your mouth. Spit the sputum into the tube, without getting any on the outside of the tube.
4. Repeat coughing and spitting until you have at least a teaspoon of sputum in the collection tube (5 mL mark on the outside of the tube).
5. Screw the lid on tightly, so the tube does not leak.
6. Wipe the outside of the tube to remove any residual sputum, if needed.
7. Write the **date and time of collection** on the label on the tube.
8. Put the tube into the plastic bag that it came in and seal the bag closed.
9. Put the specimen into the refrigerator (*not* freezer).
10. Bring the specimen(s) with you to the clinic/office if you will return within 5 days from collecting the (first) specimen.