



Providing a sputum sample

This leaflet contains information on how to provide a sputum sample.



What is sputum?

Sputum (or phlegm) is the mucus coughed up from the lungs and lower airways. Discoloured sputum may be associated with infection.

It can vary in colour, including white, colourless, yellow or green, but is usually thick and sticky.

Sputum is NOT saliva

Unlike sputum, saliva (or spit) is runny and clear. You do not want to collect saliva in your sputum sample

Why is sputum collected?

Collecting sputum helps to identify infections in the lungs and which germs are causing them.

A step-by-step guide to provide a sputum sample:

Step 1: Prior preparation

1. Obtain a sealed sterile specimen pot from your hospital clinic.
2. Rinse your mouth three times with water.
3. Sit upright in a chair or on a bed.

Helpful Tips:

- Do your sample first thing in the morning
- Do not open the sterile pot until you are ready to collect your sample

Step 2: Producing and collecting your sputum

1. Take a deep breath in through your nose, hold for three seconds, then breathe out through your mouth.
2. Repeat three times.
3. Take another deep breath in and force a deep cough.
4. Force another deep cough to bring the sputum into your mouth.
5. Open the sterile container and deposit the sputum inside.
6. If you do not produce enough sputum, repeat the process. Aim to produce one teaspoonful amount, but it is okay if this is not possible.

Step 3: Packaging and labelling your sample

1. Ensure the container is closed securely
2. Complete your details, in pen, on the label – include the date and time of the sample
3. Take the sample to your hospital clinic as soon as possible, ideally within 1-2 hours
4. Alternatively, enclose the sample in packaging that has been provided and post to the return hospital address
5. If you are delayed in delivering your sample please store it at room temperature

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk.