



Sputum collection

Sputum is a secretion formed by the lungs and the lower airways (below the larynx, or voice-box).

Examining sputum can reveal the cause of a respiratory tract infection (chest infection).

This test requires you to collect a sample of sputum.

Sputum is usually thick in consistency, opaque, and varies in colour from white to yellow to green.

Saliva, unlike sputum, is clear and colourless, and examining it will not reveal the cause of a chest infection.

Please ensure that you collect sputum and not saliva.

Collection procedure

Step 1 Obtain a sterile jar from a Sullivan Nicolaides Pathology Collection Centre. For your nearest Collection Centre, please refer to your request form, visit www.snp.com.au, or telephone **Patient Services Support** on **1300 732 030**.

The best time for you to collect sputum is when you wake up in the morning. However, if you are coughing up sputum all day, you may collect it at any time.

Step 2 Thoroughly rinse your mouth out with tap water. **do not** use toothpaste or mouth wash (e.g. Listerine).

Step 3 Cough vigorously until you feel sputum collect in the back of your throat, and then spit this into the plastic container provided.

Step 4 Check that sputum is present in your container—it should be thick, opaque, and coloured. If only saliva (a watery, clear, and colourless liquid) is present, the sample is not suitable. Obtain another collection jar from your doctor or a Collection Centre and try again.

Step 5 Return your sputum sample as soon as possible to the nearest Collection Centre. Keep the sample at room temperature until delivered unless the delay is over two hours, in which case it should be refrigerated at 2-8°C.