

National Virus Reference Laboratory: Respiratory Viral Testing Q&As for Community Services

What specimen do I send?

The recommended swab for performing a multiplex respiratory viral PCR is the Copan UTM™ swab.

Swabs can be ordered via the NVRL website and will be sent out via post.

[NVRL Swab Orders Form](#)



How do I order a test?

The test can be ordered using the Respiratory Virus PCR request form on the NVRL website


[NVRL Virology Diagnostic Request Forms](#)

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Virology Diagnostic Request Forms

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- [Guidance for the Manual Completion of NVRL Request Forms](#)
- [General Request Form \(for hospital use, general virology testing\)](#)
- [Arboviral/ Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Request Form](#)
- [STI Investigation Request Form](#)
- [Blood Borne Virus Investigation Request Form](#)
- [Oral Fluid Investigation Request Form](#)
- [Respiratory Virus PCR Request Form](#)
- [SARS-CoV-2 Whole Genome Sequencing](#)

If there is concern for an outbreak, **no more than 5 samples** should be sent as per Public Health guidance.

How do I package the specimen for transport?

It is the responsibility of the sender of the specimen to arrange packaging and transport.

Specimens require Category B transport.

- Specimen to be sent should be stored in a secure (preferably plastic) primary container.
- Wrap the container in tissue or cotton wool, which will act as absorbent material in event of any spillages.
- This should be placed in a biohazard bag
- Place the biohazard bag with the sample in a padded (jiffy bag) envelope
- Label the outer packaging with a hazard warning label, 'Diagnostic Specimen'
- Place the name, address and contact number of the destination laboratory (NVRL) on the outside of the box. Please avoid the use of staples for the closure of packages as these present a safety hazard to NVRL laboratory staff.
- Place the name, address and contact number of the originator on the outside of the envelope of transport container
- The specimen can be transported under the appropriate temperature conditions.
- UN3373 packaging can be used – as below, including the label 'Biological Substance, Category B'.

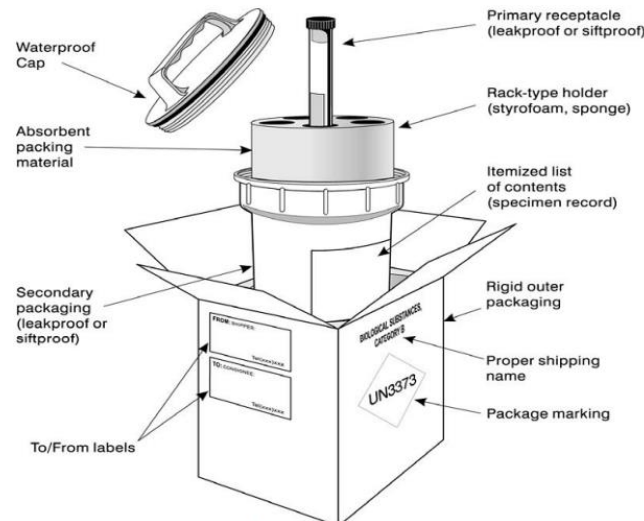


Figure 2: Example of UN3373 Packaging

[NVRL User Manual and Pathogen Index](#)

How do I transport the specimen?

We recommend arranging delivery of the samples directly from the site of origin to the NVRL e.g. by courier or taxi. Do not send via GP or via post. This ensures a faster time to result.

If a sample is taken over the weekend, it should be stored in a specimen fridge awaiting transport.

The NVRL has a dropbox for overnight deliveries. A sample can be deposited there to be ready for testing on the next working day.

[NVRL DropBox Address and Directions](#)



When is testing carried out?

Testing is carried out daily, Monday to Friday during the winter season. Testing is **NOT** available out of hours or at weekends.

The swab must be received in the lab **before 9am** to be eligible for testing that day.

The ability to test swabs will depend on laboratory capacity. Please include clinical information to ensure appropriate prioritisation of testing.

How will I get a result?

Results will be sent out via Healthlink or via post if Healthlink is not available.

Healthlink facilitates the rapid delivery of results. Organisations are strongly encouraged to utilise Healthlink where possible. If your organisation already has access to Healthlink, please contact Healthlink to receive results from the NVRL.

Results may also be sent to the patient's GP. Please specify where to send results if this is not appropriate.

Results are available Monday to Friday 9:00 to 17:30. Results are not available by phone out of hours or at weekends.

Other resources

[Guidance on testing for Acute Respiratory Infection \(ARI\) in Residential Care Facilities* \(RCF\) – Autumn/ Winter 2025/ 2026](#)

[Respiratory Virus Testing Pathway for Nursing Homes National Health Protection Office January 2024](#)

[The Laboratory Services Reform Programme ADVICE NOTE: Testing for Acute Respiratory Virus Infection Guidance](#)