

How to carry out a cough swab test

This information sheet explains how to carry out a cough swab test. You can also view a video on our Home Testing web page. It is important to follow these instructions to make sure you complete the test correctly.

Contents of the kit

In the cough swab test kit, you will find the following:

- Paper form with information details about you
- How to carry out a cough swab test leaflet
- Patient letter asking you to take the test
- White return envelope labelled UN3373 with a return address label attached and a pre-paid postage sticker
- Swab stick
- White absorbent material sheet
- Plastic transport case for swab
- Blue and clear plastic bag marked 'Safety bag'

Before you start

- You should allow about 20 minutes to carry out the cough swab test.
- It is important that you post the cough swab back to us on the day you carry out the test, so make sure you have enough time to go to your local post box before you start the test.

Taking the swab

1. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before and after carrying out cough swab test.
2. You can do some exercises to help loosen any sputum (mucus, phlegm) before you start the cough swab test, e.g. huffing (see What is a huff? on page 3).
3. You will see a cotton-tipped cough swab stick and a plastic tube inside your test kit (see Picture 1 below).

Picture 1



4. Undo the white top of the plastic tube and set the top to one side (you will no longer need this white top).
5. Now place the cotton tip of the swab in the back of the throat, taking care not to touch the walls of the throat, and cough. You can use a small mirror to help you see what you are doing.

- Put the swab stick inside the tube. Press the top of the swab down firmly to make sure it is sealed inside the tube.
- Wrap the white absorbent material sheet (Picture 2) around the tube and place the wrapped tube into the transport plastic case (also called a blister pack – see Picture 3).



(Picture 2)



(Picture 3)

- Place the transport case with the swab stick inside into the plastic safety bag and seal it.
- You will find a paper form in your test kit with information details about you and the test. Write details giving the date and time of sample collection clearly on the form.
- Place this form and the plastic safety bag containing your swab stick into the return envelope (marked UN3373). Seal the bag.



Record your sample

- Type the following link into a web browser <http://bit.do/RBHT-HomeTest>

Or scan this QR code on your phone which will open the web form:



- Complete the online form that appears on the screen to confirm that you have posted your cough swab.

Post your sample

13. Remember to post the sample back to us on the day you carry out the test. The return envelope should have a postage paid sticker and a label with the address of our laboratories stuck to it. Please check the return envelope has both stickers before you post it. The envelope can be posted into your nearest post box.
14. Dispose of all the other test kit equipment safely in your household bin.

What is a huff?

A huff is a way of breathing out through the mouth, but not coughing. It helps move sputum up your airways so that you can clear it in a controlled way.

To huff:

- Take larger than normal breath in through your nose
- Using your abdominal/diaphragm muscles squeeze the air out of your lungs and out of your mouth slightly faster until you feel the sputum moving.
- It should feel as if you are trying to mist up a mirror or your glasses using your breath.
- The huff should be long enough to move sputum from the airways.
- You will need to huff several times. Ask a member of your healthcare team if you need advice.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about taking this cough swab test, please speak to the staff caring for you or contact our home testing team:

Home Testing team

Royal Brompton Hospital

Tel: 020 7352 8121 Ext 88401 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm)

Harefield Hospital

Tel: 0330 128 5086 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm)

More information

See videos and more information on the Home Testing page on Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals' website (www.rbht.nhs.uk).

If you need help or advice about any service or department at our hospitals, and feel unable to talk to those people responsible for your care, call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 020 7349 7715 or email pals@rbht.nhs.uk. This is a confidential service.

Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals are part of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.