

How to carry out a sputum test

This information sheet explains how to carry out a sputum test. This test involves collecting a sample of sputum. It is important to follow these instructions to make sure the test is completed correctly.

Contents of the kit

In the sputum test kit, you will find the following:

- Paper form with information details about you
- How to carry out a sputum 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
- Sample pot
- White absorbent material sheet
- Plastic transport case for pot
- Blue and clear plastic bag marked 'Safety bag'

Before you start

- Allow about 20 minutes to carry out the sputum test.
- It is important that you post your sputum test sample 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.

Collecting your sputum sample

1. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before and after carrying out the sputum test.
2. Do some exercises to help loosen any sputum (mucus, phlegm) before you start the sputum test. Try some long huffs (see What is a huff? on page 3), a cough and then clear your throat to gather the sample in your mouth and spit it into the pot provided (Picture 1).



Picture 1

- The sputum sample pot should be placed in the plastic case. The case may already have a lining of absorbent material (see Picture 2.) If the case does not have this material use the small sheet of the absorbent material which comes with your kit to wrap round the sample pot. Place the pot in the wrapped sample pot into the plastic casing (see Picture 3).



Picture 2



Picture 3

- Close the plastic case and press around the edges to firmly shut the case around the sample (Picture 4).



Picture 4



Picture 5

- Next place the plastic case containing the sample inside the plastic safety bag (Picture 5) and seal the bag.
- You will find a paper form in your test kit with information details about you and the test. Write the date and time the sputum sample was taken clearly on the form.
- Place this form and the plastic safety bag containing the sputum sample into the return envelope (marked UN3373), see Picture 6 and 7. Seal the bag.



Picture 6



Picture 7

Record your sample

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

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



9. Complete the online form that appears on the screen to confirm that you have posted the sputum sample.

Posting your sample back to us

10. 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.

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 a 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 using your breath.
- The huff should be long enough to move sputum from the airways.
- You may 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 carrying out this sputum 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 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.