

How to carry out a sputum test on a child

This information sheet explains how to carry out a sputum test on your child. 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 your child
- 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 test
- It is important that you post the 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.

Performing the sputum test

1. Wash yours and your child's hands for at least 20 seconds before and after carrying out the cough swab test.
2. Encourage your child to do some exercises to help loosen any sputum (mucus, phlegm) before starting. Try some long huffs, a cough and then clearing the throat. This will help your child to gather the sample in his/her mouth and spit it into the pot provided (Picture 1) (see What is a huff on page 3)



Picture 1.

3. You will find a paper form in your test kit with information details about your child and the test. Write the date and time the sputum sample was taken clearly on the form.
4. Wrap the white absorbent material (Picture 2) around the tube and place the wrapped tube into the transport plastic case, also called a blister pack (Picture 3).



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4

5. Place the transport case with the sample pot inside into the safety bag (Picture 4) and seal it.
6. Place the form which you wrote the date and time of your child's sample on inside the return envelope which is marked UN3373.
7. Put the safety bag inside the return envelope alongside your paper form and seal the bag. (Pictures 5 and 6)



Picture 5



Picture 6

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. Usually children aged 3-4 and up can start to learn how to huff.

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.

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