

Instructions for Collecting Sputum for a TB Test



Why Do I Need a Sputum Test?

Your doctor wants to look for tuberculosis germs in the fluid of your lungs – sputum – or “phlegm” that you cough up from your lungs.

Checking your sputum is the best way to find out if you have TB disease. If you are already taking medicine for TB, checking your sputum is the best way to tell if the medicine is working. The laboratory will report the results to your doctor.



To get a good sample, you must cough up sputum from deep in your lungs. Sputum from your lungs is usually thick and sticky. This does not include saliva (spit) or sinus drainage in your throat (snot). Saliva is thin and watery. **DO NOT** collect saliva.



➔ How to Collect a Sputum Sample

Your doctor or nurse will give you a special plastic tube for collecting sputum. Follow these steps carefully:

- 1** The tube is very clean. Don't open it until you are ready to use it and do not touch the inside of the tube.
- 2** As soon as you wake up in the morning collect your sputum.
- 3** If possible, go outside or open a window before collecting the sputum. This helps protect other people from TB germs when you cough.
- 4** Take a very deep breath and hold for 5 seconds. Slowly breathe out.
Take another deep breath and cough hard until some sputum comes up in your mouth.
- 5** Spit the sputum into the plastic tube.
- 6** Keep doing this until the sputum reaches the 5 ml mark (first line) on the plastic tube.
- 7** Screw the cap on the cup tightly so it doesn't leak.
- 8** Wipe off the outside of the tube with a tissue.
- 9** Put the plastic tube in the metal container and screw the lid on tightly.
- 10** Put the metal container into the cardboard container and screw the lid tightly.
- 11** If your nurse tells you to store your sputum over night, put it in the refrigerator. Do **NOT** put it in the freezer or keep at room temperature.