

**West Virginia Department of Health - Division of TB Elimination**  
**Patient Instructions for TB Sputum Collection**

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**Why do I need a sputum test?**

The fluid in your lungs is called sputum or phlegm. It is the best way to find out if you have TB disease. TB disease can make you very sick and can be spread to others around you by coughing, sneezing and even talking. We collect sputum 3 days in a row so that we have a greater chance of detecting the germ.

**Is there a difference between sputum and saliva?**

Yes, sputum comes from deep inside your lungs and is usually thick and sticky. It normally is white but if you are sick can be other colors such as green, yellow and even blood tinged. You must cough sputum up out of your lungs. Saliva comes from your mouth and is watery and thin and it cannot be tested for TB disease.








**Things to remember when I am collecting sputum.**

We have provided a step-by-step instruction page on how to collect your sputum, but first here are some very important things to remember while collecting your sputum:

1. Make sure you are collecting sputum and not saliva.
2. Keep coughing up sputum until you get it to the fill line which is 5ml or a teaspoon full of sputum.
3. The best time to collect sputum is early in the morning after you first wake up before you brush your teeth. Do not use mouthwash prior to sputum collection. Rinse your mouth out with water before starting.
4. Take a very deep breath and fill your lungs with air. Hold the air for 5 seconds then breath out slowly. Do this 3 times in a row and at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> breath cough hard until some sputum comes up into your mouth.
5. The tube is sterile which means it's very clean. Don't open it until you are ready to use it or touch inside the tube. This could contaminate the results of the sputum.
6. If you have any problems with collecting your sputum please contact your local health department for further instructions.
7. The sputum must be kept cold. When you are finished place it in the refrigerator until the local health department nurse can get it.

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**Step by step instructions on collecting sputum for TB testing**

	<p><b><u>Step 1</u></b></p> <p>Keep the tube closed until you are ready to use it. Rinse your mouth with water. Early in the morning take 3 deep breaths. Hold them each for 5 seconds. At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cough really hard into the tube to the fill line, 5ml or a teaspoon full. Remember to cough from deep inside your lungs to get the sputum. Make sure it's not saliva.</p>
	<p><b><u>Step 2</u></b></p> <p>Place the cap on the tube really tight so that it will not leak. You worked hard to get the sputum for us to test we don't want to waste it.</p>
	<p><b><u>Step 3</u></b></p> <p>Again, tighten the lid to the tube before this step so that the sputum doesn't get diluted with water. Wash the outside of the tube with soap and water and then dry it off really good.</p>
	<p><b><u>Step 4</u></b></p> <p>Write your name and the date on the tube. This is very important information the laboratory will need to know for the results.</p>
	<p><b><u>Step 5</u></b></p> <p>Place the tube and the absorbent sheet into the clear plastic bag.</p>
	<p><b><u>Step 6</u></b></p> <p>Seal the plastic bag by peeling off the tape liner to expose the adhesive. Fold the plastic bag at the slit and gently press the adhesive to seal the bag. Place the sealed bag in the refrigerator.</p>
	<p><b><u>Step 7</u></b></p> <p>Contact your local health department nurse to let her know you have collected the day's sputum for each day. You and the nurse will work out how they are going to get them to mail. The nurse will contact Office of Laboratory Services (OLS) to make sure they are shipping it correctly and with any shipping questions they have.</p>