Adapted from BC CDC PHSA Lab Manual

**Background**

Nasopharyngeal swabs are used for the detection of respiratory viruses such as RSV, influenza virus A & B or parainfluenza virus. A properly collected viral swab (one nare is sufficient) is necessary for detection of these organisms.

A close up of a piece of paper

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Assemble supplies:

1. Universal Transport Medium (UTM) Kit (red top viral transfer container). Check expiration date. Personal protection equipment (i.e., mask, gloves, eye protection, gowns). Requisition and label, biohazard bag. Note: if no red top UTM kits are available, the blue top viral transfer may be used.

1. Explain procedure to patient.
2. Wash hands. Put on appropriate personal protective equipment (at a minimum, gloves and facemask) to protect yourself in case the patient coughs or sneezes while you are collecting the specimen.
3. If the patient has a lot of mucous in his/her nose, this can interfere with the collection of cells. Ask the patient to use a tissue to gently clean out visible nasal mucous before a swab is taken. Influenza viruses are located in cells that line the surface of the inner nose. The virus is not found in the mucous discharge.
4. Seat patient in a comfortable bed. It is best if the patient is placed in a high-fowler’s position in bed with the back of the head supported. It may be necessary to have a second person available to assist with collection.
5. Swab collection

![A picture containing food

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**Nasopharyngeal swab**

* Enter a flexible swab several centimeters with a slow, steady motion along the floor of the nose (straight back, not up the nose) until the posterior nasopharynx has been reached (distance from nostrils to external opening of ear).
* Place finger on the tip of the patient/resident’s nose and depress slightly.
* Once resistance is met (the swab should pass into the pharynx relatively easily), rotate the swab several times and withdraw the swab.
* Break off top of swab (it will snap off).
* Place in transport medium.
* Remove personal protective equipment, wash hands.
* Ensure the specimen is labeled and transport to the laboratory with completed requisition.