How to Break-off a Collected Specimen Swab into Transport Media

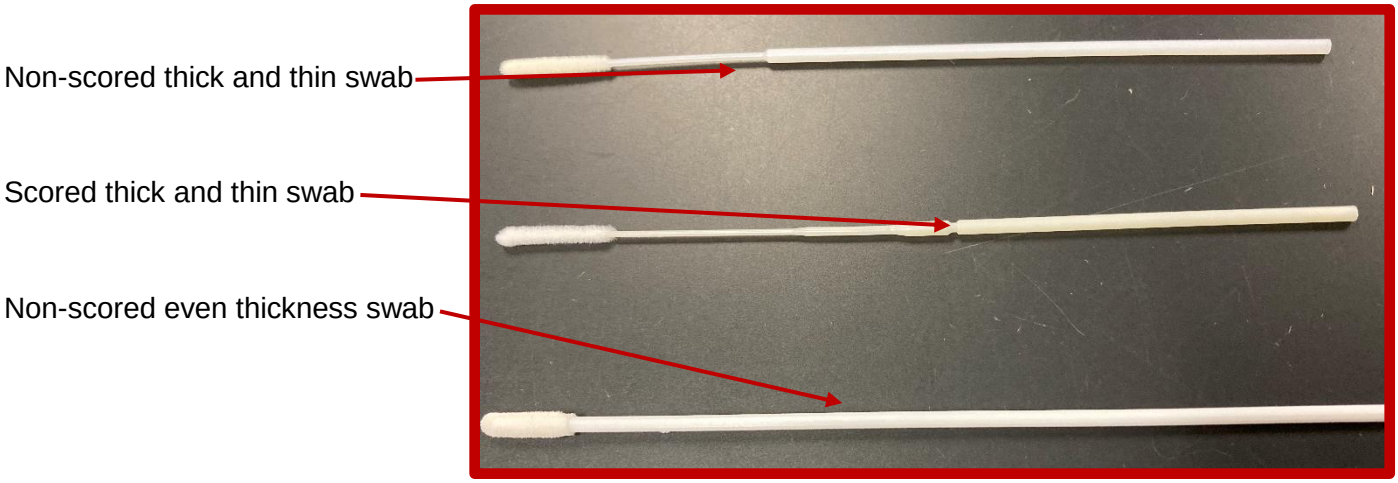
The following directions are being provided to help you correctly break-off a swab collected from a suspect COVID-19 patient into a tube containing viral or saline transport media.

Swabs:

- There are many different collection swabs you can use depending on the area of the body you're collecting from and the lab where the specimen is being tested.
- Each testing laboratory has validated specific types of collection swabs and transport media for the COVID-19 testing that they perform, so make sure you check with your testing laboratory to find out what collection kits they accept. (e.g. one laboratory may only accept a nasal swab submitted in a tube of saline. Another lab may accept nasal, mid-turbinate, and NP swabs, but only if submitted in viral transport media.)
- It is important to discard the handle of the swab as it may be contaminated from your hand and will not easily fit in the tube.
- Leaving the swab tip in the transport liquid helps to improve your chances of detecting virus in an infected patient.

Swab Types:

- Swabs may have easily seen markings or scores to indicate where they break off from the tip, or they may not have any scoring.



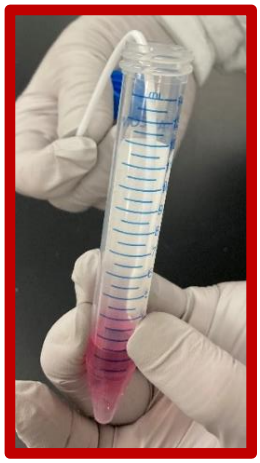
Transport Tubes:

- Transport media tubes can come in various sizes.
- These are the standard size but some may be much shorter.

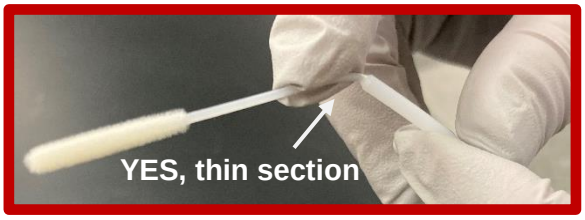
Breaking Off the Swab:

- Insert the swab into the tube so it is at least a ½ inch from the bottom of the tube.
- You want to break off the swab into the transport media so that the swab with the remaining shaft is at least ½ inch shorter than the transport tube.

- If there is a score marked on the shaft of the swab that will allow you to easily break off the swab so that it is ½ inch shorter than the transport tube, bend the shaft at the score line back and forth against the top of the tube until it breaks off into the transport tube.



- If there isn't a score marked on the shaft, or if the score mark is above were you need to break the swab so that the swab will be ½ inch shorter than the transport tube, then you will have to break it below the score line closer to the swab tip.
- Start by bending the shaft back and forth from right to left against the top of the tube. You may have to do this multiple times until the shaft breaks. It will eventually break.
- Some swabs have thicker and thinner parts of the shaft. It will be easier to break the swab at the thinner section and not at the thicker section.

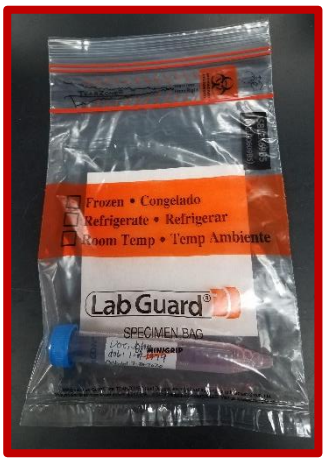


- When the swab breaks off it should fall to the bottom of the tube and you should have at least a ½ inch space from the top of the remaining shaft to the top of the tube. Only the collection tip is required.
- **Note:** We don't recommend using scissors to cut the shaft because then you have a contaminated sharp item you will need to store until it can be disinfected and cleaned.
- **NEVER** force a shaft that is taller than the tube to bend by jamming it in the tube and screwing on the cap. This places pressure on the cap that often results in a leaking specimen that contaminates the outside of the tube and places those who handle the tube at risk of exposure. A leaking specimen causes a delay in testing and may even result in the lab rejecting the specimen for testing.

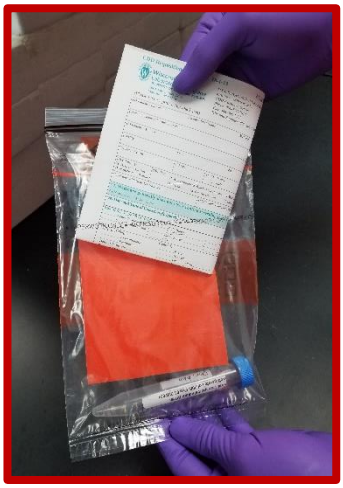
- Once the swab breaks off into the tube, carefully screw the cap securely onto the tube making sure the cap is threaded on the tube correctly.
- **DO NOT** use scotch tape or masking tape to tape the cap to the tube as this slows down the testing process by requiring the lab to first remove all the sticky tape. If you feel it is essential to seal the cap to the tube, then use of parafilm is acceptable.
- Label the specimen tube properly with the **patient's name**, the **patient's date of birth**, and **the date and time of collection**.

Packaging the Specimen:

- Place the specimen into a biohazard bag containing absorbent material that is capable of absorbing the entire specimen contents. **DO NOT** wrap and/or tape absorbent material to the tube as this slows down the testing process while the absorbent material is removed from the tube before testing.
- Place only one specimen in a biohazard bag.
- Carefully seal the biohazard bag to contain any leaks should the specimen break or leak during transport.



- Place the requisition form in the outer pocket of the bag. **NEVER** place the paper in the bag next to the specimen or wrap the paper around the specimen. If it leaks, the paper will be contaminated.
- If there isn't a pocket on the bag you may tape the requisition to the bag**.** **NEVER** staple the requisition to the bag or put any holes in the bag.



Video Clips:

- Additional information and 3 short swab snapping video clips are available on our COVID-19 web page http://www.slh.wisc.edu/clinical/diseases/covid-19/
  - Swab with a score mark: https://youtu.be/DPJYaorD32A
  - Swab with NO score mark: https://youtu.be/nv7ybf4qTnc
  - Swab thinner near the tip: https://youtu.be/4B2dQ6HX4nQ

Questions:

- If you have any questions, please call the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene Customer Service at 1-800-862-1013.