

# Memorandum



**To:** Frontline staff collecting COVID-19 specimens

**From:** Dr Chris Mansell clinical microbiologist

**Date:** 17 July 2020

**Subject:** Nasopharyngeal and Throat Swabs for COVID-19 testing

The Ministry of Health advised (14 July) that Throat (Oropharyngeal) swabs may be used for community testing:

“ Please note either nasopharyngeal and / or oropharyngeal swabs are appropriate for the collection of specimens for COVID-19 testing.” <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-health-professionals/covid-19-primary-care#testing>

We hear that some people are, understandably, reluctant to have undergo nasopharyngeal swabbing or consent to this for their children. In addition, bacterial throat swabs are sometimes needed for rheumatic fever prevention.

Throat swabs collect only about 10% as much virus as nasopharyngeal swabs <sup>1</sup>. Test methods in use at Waikato Hospital would detect most early cases of symptomatic COVID-19, even with this reduced sampling efficiency. However, viral shedding is likely to be lower in asymptomatic, presymptomatic and convalescent people.

Recommended swab collection

Context	Swab site
Symptomatic people < 5 days from onset at General practice and community based urgent care facilities (Anglesea Clinic)	NPS recommended TS accepted
Symptomatic people < 5 days from onset at Community Based Assessment Centres and Designated COVID testing practices	NPS recommended TS accepted
Symptomatic people ≥ 5 days from onset	NPS only please
All asymptomatic people	NPS only please
Managed Isolation Facilities	NPS only please
Emergency Departments	NPS only please
Hospital wards and clinics	NPS only please
Suspected outbreaks and contact tracing	NPS only please
Work and travel clearance	NPS only please

Reference: 1 Wang H, Liu Q, Hu J, Zhou M, Yu M, Li K, Xu D, Xiao Y, Yang J, Lu Y, Wang F, Yin P and Xu S (2020) Nasopharyngeal Swabs Are More Sensitive Than Oropharyngeal Swabs for COVID-19 Diagnosis and Monitoring the SARS-CoV-2 Load. *Front. Med.* 7:334. doi: 10.3389/fmed.2020.00334