How to Collect a Mucus Sample at Home

Getting mucus for a trach culture

Keep watch for trachea infections

A child with a trach can get an infection in the trachea (windpipe.) The medical word for this infection is tracheitis. The infection causes redness and swelling (inflammation) of the upper airway and increased mucus. The mucus becomes thicker, smells and changes to a yellow or green color. When an infection is suspected, a specimen trap is often used to collect a sample of mucus for a trach culture.

What is a trach culture?

A trach culture is a test that is done on the mucus you collect from the trach tube using a specimen trap. This test is ordered by your child's primary care doctor and the mucus sample is taken to a laboratory for testing (called a culture).

Using a specimen trap

A specimen trap is a special cup with a lid (see on left). You get these from your supply company. It is important not to touch the inside of the lid or container. The only thing that should touch the inside of the specimen trap is your child’s mucus when you suction the trach.

How do I collect a mucus sample?

Gather supplies

• Specimen trap (pictured at left)
• Suction machine and connective tubing
• Brand new, never been used suction catheter package - simple suction catheter of appropriate size
• Resuscitator bag connected to oxygen, for use if needed
• Normal saline packets
• Gloves and hand sanitizer

Steps

1. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer.
2. Put gloves on.
3. Turn on the suction machine and check suction pressure.
4. Give blow-by O2 with resuscitator bag, or increase the O2 on the ventilator if needed.
How to Collect a Mucus Sample

5. Open the sterile specimen trap package.

Refer to photo above:
6. Connect suction connective tubing to the white end of the specimen trap.
7. Open suction catheter package. Connect suction catheter to green end of specimen trap. Be careful not to touch the tip of the catheter.
8. Suction as normal. The mucus will collect in the specimen cup container.
9. Limit suctioning time to less than 10 seconds in the tube at a time.
10. Repeat suction steps and blow-by O2 or increased O2 on the ventilator as needed, using saline only if the mucus remain thick and hard to suction through the catheter.
11. After you have finished collecting a sample of mucus (at least ¼ teaspoon size), remove the top of the specimen trap and catheter and discard in the garbage (see below).
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Prepare the sample to bring to a lab

1. Take the cap from the bottom of the specimen trap and put it on top of the container. Be sure to screw it on tightly and do not touch the inside of the container or the inside of the cap. Discard the rest of the specimen trap parts.

2. Write your child’s name and the date that the sample was collected. Put the label on the container.

3. Call your primary care provider’s office.

4. Take the sample to the lab per your primary care office instructions.

5. The lab will contact your child’s doctor with the test results. The doctor will then let you know the results and if you need to give your child medicines.

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Seattle Children’s offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children’s will make this information available in alternate formats upon request.

Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s healthcare provider.

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