

Instructions for Collecting Sputum for TB

Why do I need a sputum sample?

Your doctor wants to collect some of the sputum (phlegm) that you cough up from your lungs. Your sputum will be tested for tuberculosis (TB) germs.

Checking your sputum is the best way to find out if you have TB disease. It is also the best way to tell if TB medicine is working.

To be sure your test is correct, you must cough up sputum from deep inside your lungs. Sputum is different than saliva (spit). Sputum comes from your lungs and is usually thick. Saliva (spit) comes from your mouth and is thin and watery. **Be sure you collect sputum, not saliva.**

Tip: If you cannot cough up sputum, try breathing steam, like from a hot shower.

How do I collect a sputum sample?

Your doctor or nurse will give you a special plastic cup with your name on it to collect your sputum. Follow these easy steps:

- Don't open the cup until you are ready to use it.
- As soon as you wake up in the morning, and before you eat or drink anything, brush your teeth and rinse your mouth with water. **Do not use mouthwash.**
- If possible, go outside or open a window before collecting the sputum sample. This helps protect other people from TB germs when you cough.
- Take a deep breath and hold it for 5 seconds. Breathe out slowly. Take another deep breath and cough hard until some sputum comes up.
- Cough up the sputum into the plastic cup.
- Keep doing this until the sputum reaches the **5 ml** line on the plastic cup, if you can.
- Screw the cap on tight so it doesn't leak. Wash and dry the outside of the cup. Don't let water get into the cup.
- On the cup label, write the date you collected the sputum.
- Put the cup back into the box or bag that the nurse gave you. Give the cup to the clinic or nurse. You may be asked to put it in the mail.
- You can keep the cup in the refrigerator overnight if you have to. **Do not put it in the freezer or leave it at room temperature.**

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