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Subject:	MICROBIOLOGY SPECIMEN COLLECTION AND TRANSPORT				
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MICROBIOLOGY SPECIMEN COLLECTION AND TRANSPORT

Specimen collection and transportation are critical considerations because the quality of the test result is often affected by the nature of the specimen and its condition on arrival in the laboratory.

The following are general considerations regarding the collection of material for culture. Specific instructions for the handling of a variety of specimens will be given in subsequent pages.

1. Whenever possible, specimens should be obtained before antimicrobial agents have been administered.
2. The material should be collected where the suspected organisms is most likely to be found, with as little external contamination as possible.
3. Another factor contributing to the successful isolation of the causative agent is the stage of the disease at which the specimen is collected for culture.
4. Specimens should be of sufficient quantity to permit complete examination and should be placed in sterile containers or specific transport containers to promote survival of pathogenic bacteria, eliminate leakage of specimen, and allow safe handling during transport and processing.
5. Provisions for prompt delivery of the specimen to the microbiology laboratory must be made if the results of analysis are to be valid.
6. While not a function of specimen collection, the laboratory should be given sufficient clinical information and exact source of the specimen to guide the microbiologist in selection of suitable media and appropriate techniques for optimal recovery of pathogens. Likewise the limitations and potentials of the microbiology laboratory must be appreciated and it must be remembered that a negative report does not necessarily invalidate the diagnosis. Close cooperation and frequent consultation must occur among the clinician, nurse and microbiologist for optimal services to both the patient and physician.
7. Swabs are inappropriate collection devices for the recovery of mycobacterium and anaerobes.

Reference: Murray, Patrick R. (Editor in Chief), editors Baron, Ellen Jo, Jorgenson, James H., Landry, Marie Louise, Pfaller, Michael A., 2007. Manual of Clinical Microbiology, American Society for Microbiology, Washington, D.C.