

How to Give a Sputum Sample

For testing for tuberculosis

SPUTUM IS NOT SALIVA

We need **thick material coughed up from deep in the chest** — not spit from the mouth. A saliva sample is the commonest reason a TB test comes back falsely negative, and it means repeating everything. Please take the time to do this properly.

Step by step

1. **Do it early in the morning, immediately after waking** — that is when the sputum has collected overnight.
2. **Rinse your mouth well with plain water first.** Do not use mouthwash or toothpaste, and do not eat before giving the sample.
3. **Go outdoors or to an open, well-ventilated place**, away from other people. Never do this in a closed room with family around.
4. Take **two deep breaths**, holding each for a few seconds and breathing out slowly.
5. Take a **third deep breath, then cough out hard from deep in the chest.**
6. Open the container, hold it close to your lips and **spit the coughed-up material directly into it.** Do not touch the inside of the container or lid.
7. Repeat until you have collected about **2 teaspoons (5 mL)** — roughly to the mark on the container.
8. **Close the lid tightly** and check it does not leak. Wash your hands with soap.

IF NOTHING COMES UP

Take a warm drink or a hot steam inhalation, walk about, and try again after 15–20 minutes. Do not give saliva instead. If you truly cannot produce any, tell us — there are other ways to get a sample.

STORING AND BRINGING IT

Label the container with your **name and the date** before you start. Keep it upright in a cool place or the refrigerator (not the freezer), and bring it to the laboratory **the same day**. Usually two samples are needed — follow the instruction given to you.

Search: sputum collection, TB test, AFB, gene xpert, cough sample

