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Laboratory – Sputum for Bacterial, Fungal and/or AFB (TB) Culture

Description: Your doctor has requested that your sputum be analyzed in the laboratory. The analysis will determine the presence or absence of bacteria or fungi capable of causing respiratory infections. The reliability of these tests is dependent on good specimen collection and prompt transport to the laboratory. If transport is delayed, please refrigerate the specimen to preserve it.

What to expect: You will be given a sputum collection container to take home with you. Please carefully read and follow the collection instructions listed below. Final test results are available to your doctor in two to four days for bacterial culture; four weeks for fungal culture; and eight weeks for AFB (TB) culture.

What to do:

1. A sputum sample is material that is coughed up from the lungs. It is not "saliva" which is the liquid secretions found in the mouth, or nasal secretions. These samples are not acceptable for culture. A sputum specimen is best collected in the morning upon getting up from a reclining position or when a deep cough from the lungs can be produced. The sputum raised should be expelled into a specimen cup that has been obtained from the doctor's office or the Laboratory. It should be brought to the lab within two hours. Be certain that the specimen container is tightly sealed before transporting.
2. If you were not provided with a collection container, any CLEAN, DRY container with a tight-fitting lid may be used. **NOTE:** Do not allow any specimen to contaminate the outside of the container. Specimen containers that are externally contaminated will be rejected by the Laboratory.
3. Clearly write the patient's name and date of birth on the outside of the container; include the collection date and time. Place the specimen container inside a zip-lock or plastic bag before transporting.
4. If you cannot bring the specimen to the hospital immediately, please refrigerate it. In all cases, deliver within eight hours.

Where to go: Central Registration at Evanston, Glenbrook, Highland Park or Skokie Hospitals or a Patient Service Center. Bring your specimen and additionally, you will be asked to provide a physician order if not already in the electronic health record and billing/insurance information.

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Who to call if you have questions: If you have questions or would like additional information, ***if you have*** please call Microbiology Laboratory at Evanston Hospital at (847) 570-2733.