



# Protocol for pooled sample collection – Michaelmas Term 2021

*This protocol is for pooled screening test kits in brown envelopes with blue logos. All participating members of the testing pool must scan the QR code or type in the website URL on the test kit envelope to assign the kit to the pool (Step 1).*

**Step 1** – Using the camera app on your mobile phones, **all members** of the testing pool should scan the QR code on the test kit envelope, and follow the instructions on the screen. Alternatively, you may type the website URL on the test kit envelope into a web browser. You will need to authenticate using your Raven login (i.e. using your CRSid – your University email address). This is essential to allow us to assign the test kit to your testing pool! All students contributing swabs from your testing pool into this sample need to do this.

**Step 2** – Your *pool lead* should ensure that everyone in your *testing pool* is ready, and that everything is in place to start swabbing. The sample tube should be placed within a sample tube stand and should be located in a shared area, such as a kitchen or bathroom. Remember to maintain social distancing throughout!



**Step 3** – Your sample should be taken in your own room or bathroom, by yourself, with the door closed.

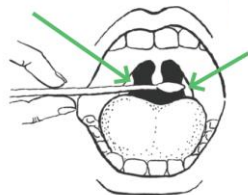
**Step 4** – Gently blow your nose and cough into a tissue. Throw the tissue away.

**Step 5** – Wash your hands.

**Step 6** – Remove the swab from its wrapper.



**Step 7** – Open your mouth wide and gently rub the fabric tip of the swab over both tonsils at the back of your throat, rotating as you do so. Try not to touch your tongue, teeth, cheeks, gums, or any other surfaces with the tip of the swab.



**Step 8** – Insert the same end of the same swab gently into your nostril about 2.5cm (1 inch), or until you feel some resistance. Rotate the swab and slowly remove it.



**Step 9** – Return the swab to the inside of its wrapper, taking care not to touch it on anything else.

**Step 10** – Wash your hands.

**Step 11** – Carry the swab into the room with the sample tube, ensuring that it remains inside its wrapper.



**Step 12** – Remove the swab from its wrapper, snap off the unused end, and place the end with the fabric tip in the sample tube. Make sure the fabric tip is facing down. Dispose of the unused end and the wrapper in a waste bin, in the same way you would dispose of dental floss. You and the other members of your testing pool should take it in turns, until all your swabs are placed in the same sample tube.

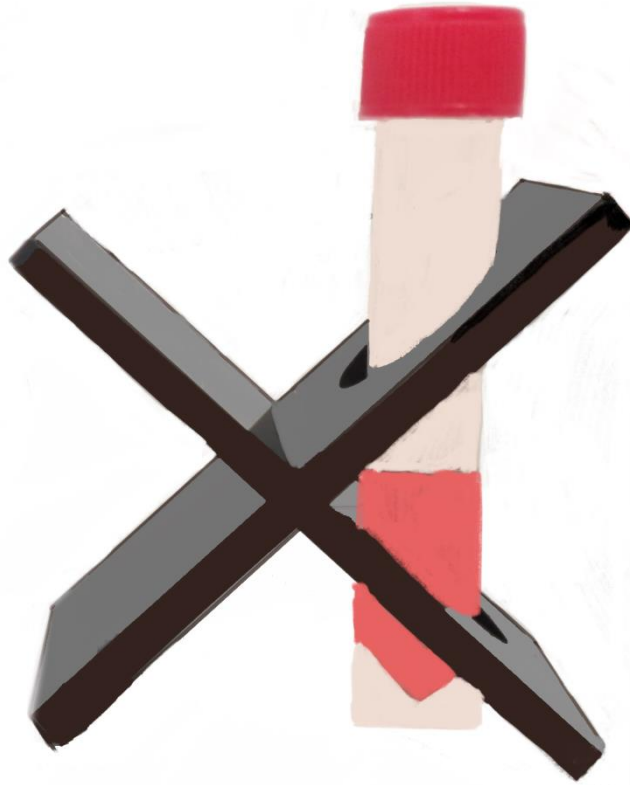
**Step 13** – Wash your hands.

**Step 14** – Once you and the other members of your testing pool have placed all your swabs in the sample tube, your pool lead should securely screw on the lid.

**Step 15** – Place the sample tube into the clear plastic bag, together with the absorbent pad. Squeeze out any air and seal the bag. Place this sample bag into the second bag, squeeze out any air and seal the second bag. The sample is now “double-bagged”.

**Step 16** – For students in College accommodation, take the double-bagged sample to your College collection point before 12pm.

For students in private accommodation, take the double-bagged sample to your nearest drop-box location before 13:30pm.



**Diagram of assembled sample tube stand**

For further information, please visit the University of Cambridge asymptomatic Covid-19 screening programme website at:

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus/stay-safe-cambridge-uni/asymptomatic-covid-19-screening-programme>

*Taking your sample may cause minor discomfort for a few seconds, but it shouldn't hurt.*

***Thank you for helping us keep Cambridge safe!***

## Full guidance

This protocol is for **pooled screening test kits in brown envelopes with blue logos**. These test kits must be assigned to the testing pool. **All participating members of the pool must therefore scan the QR code or type in the website URL on the test kit envelope**. This will allow us to assign the test kit to the right testing pool, and determine who has contributed a swab. Students who are **not** contributing swabs for any reason should **not** scan the QR code or type in the website URL, even if they are the pool lead.

*This protocol has been adapted from the NHS Test and Trace and Cambridge University Hospitals swabbing protocols.*

### Tips for taking your test

Taking the test may feel a little uncomfortable or unusual... remain calm and confident as you go through the process! Please remember to maintain appropriate social distancing at all times.

#### 1. Be prepared!

- a. Please ensure that everyone in your testing pool is comfortable with the swabbing procedure before you start.
- b. Agree a time when everyone in your testing pool is available to take their swab at the same time. Many households will find that swabbing first thing in the morning is the most convenient time.
- c. For students living in private accommodation, the pool lead will have been agreed at the time that your testing pool was registered with their College. The pool lead will take responsibility for collecting the testing kit prior to the swab time, and delivering the completed sample to the appropriate location within College after the swabs are complete. A shared WhatsApp group (or equivalent) may be useful to organise this.
- d. Pick up the test kit from the location agreed by your College (the College of the pool lead for students living in private accommodation), on the day prior to swabbing. Please ensure that only one test kit is collected per testing pool.

#### 2. At the time of swabbing:

- a. At the agreed time, the pool lead should remind all of the members of the pool that a swab is due, and ensure that they each have a swab. There are **8** swabs in each testing kit; if you require additional swabs, they are available from your College.
- b. Using the camera app on your mobile phones, all members of the testing pool should scan the QR code on the test kit envelope, and follow the instructions on the screen. Alternatively, they may type the website URL on the test kit envelope into a web browser. You will need to authenticate using your Raven login (i.e. using your CRSid – your University email address). **This is essential to allow us to assign the test kit to you and your testing pool, and determine who has contributed a swab – if you do not scan the kit, we will not be able to provide you with your result! All students from the testing pool contributing swabs need to do this.** Conversely, students who are not contributing swabs must **not** scan the QR code or type in the website URL, even if they are the pool lead.
- c. Clean and dry a flat surface in an appropriate communal area (such as a kitchen or bathroom) to place the sample tube on. If no communal areas are available, use an

agreed location that can be accessed by all members of the pool while maintaining appropriate social distancing, such as the bathroom or kitchen of one of the pool members.

- d. Place the sample tube into the stand provided, so that it is held stably in position.
- e. When members of the pool are ready to start swabbing, unscrew the lid of the sample tube and place it carefully to one side. Do not move the sample tube from its current location until all of the swabs have been inserted.

### 3. Taking the swab:

- a. Swabs should be taken in your own room or bathroom, by yourself, with the door closed.
- b. Look inside the mouth, and find your tonsils at the back of the throat. Use a mirror to help. Tonsils – or where they would have been if they have been removed – are where you will swab the sample.
- c. Gently blow your nose and cough into a tissue. This is so that excess mucus does not interfere with the test. Throw the tissue away.
- d. Wash your hands.
- e. Open the package and gently take out the swab. This will be used for both tonsils and nose. Be careful not to touch the fabric end of the swab.
- f. Holding the swab in your hand, open the mouth wide and gently rub the **fabric tip** of the swab over both tonsils at the back of the throat, rotating as you do so (use a torch and/or mirror to help you do this). Remove the swab from the back of the throat. **Important** – taking the sample may cause gagging and minor discomfort, but it should not hurt. Try not to touch your tongue, teeth, cheeks, gums, or any other surfaces with the fabric tip of the swab.
- g. Put the **same end** of the **same swab** gently into the nostril about 2.5cm (1 inch) or until you feel some resistance. Rotate the swab and slowly remove it. You only need to sample one nostril. If you have a piercing use the other nostril. **Important** – taking the sample may cause mild discomfort, but it should not hurt. Do not insert the swab any deeper if you feel resistance or pain.
- h. Return the swab to the inside of the plastic wrapper, taking care not to touch the swab on any other surface.
- i. Wash your hands.

### 4. Placing the swab in the sample tube:

- a. Carry the swab into the room with the sample tube, ensuring that it remains inside its plastic wrapper at all times.
- b. Each member of the pool in turn removes their swab from its wrapper and snaps off the unused end at the breakpoint in the middle of the swab. Be careful not to touch the fabric end of the swab as you do this. Dispose of the discarded end of the swab in a waste bin, in the same way that you would dispose of dental floss or a used tissue.
- c. Place the swab into the sample tube. Make sure the fabric tip is facing down as you place it into the sample tube. Dispose of the discarded wrapper in a waste bin, in the same way that you would dispose of dental floss.
- d. Wash your hands
- e. Once all members of the pool have placed their swabs into the sample tube, the pool lead should securely screw on the lid, so that no liquid can leak. You may need

to apply pressure to get the lid on. If any of the solution inside the vial leaks, it will not be possible to test your sample

- f. Wash your hands.
  - g. The pool lead should place the sample tube into one of the plastic bags with the absorbent pad, gently squeeze out any excess air and seal well. Then place the bag containing the sample tube into the second bag (so the sample is “double bagged”), squeeze out the excess air and seal well.
  - h. Wipe down the stand and the surrounding surface with the alcohol wipe provided in the testing kit.
5. **And finally...** The pool lead takes the sample to a drop-off point so that it can be collected for testing:
- a. For students living in College accommodation, please take this to your designated College collection points by **12:00 midday**.
  - b. For students living in private accommodation or one of the Houses of the Cambridge Theological Federation please take this to one of the drop-boxes used for individual confirmatory tests by **1:30 PM**:  
[https://www.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cam.ac.uk/files/documents/lent\\_term\\_drop-boxes\\_map.pdf](https://www.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cam.ac.uk/files/documents/lent_term_drop-boxes_map.pdf)

Spare swabs and plastic bags will be available in each College.

**Thank you for helping us keep Cambridge safe!**

## FAQs

### **1. Can I eat or drink before the test?**

Yes.

### **2. What do I do if I drop the swab or it is contaminated before going into the vial?**

This swab can no longer be used. Dispose of the swab in the same way that you would dispose of dental floss or a used tissue. You will need to start the process again using a fresh swab. If one is present in your pool's testing pack, please use that. Otherwise, spare swabs are available in all Colleges.

### **3. Can my finger touch the break point of the swab?**

Yes. The break point is a moulded weak point roughly halfway along the plastic shaft of the swab, which allows you to safely and easily break off the fabric part of the swab. You can touch the break point during the process of breaking the swab stick in two, but please be sure not to touch the fabric tip or the plastic shaft close to this tip.

### **4. Can we get more testing kits if ours is damaged/goes missing?**

Each College is provided with multiple spare testing kits. Spare swabs and plastic bags are also available in each College. In the event of damage or missing kit components, please contact your College to arrange for replacements.

### **5. Are the liquid contents of the tube harmful?**

None of the ingredients in the tube are considered harmful at the (low) concentration present. The solution contain inorganic salts, organic compounds, antibiotics, carbohydrates and phenol red. After preparation in water, all ingredients are in concentrations of less than 1%.

### **6. What do we do if we spill the contents of the tube?**

Don't panic! Cover the spillage in paper towels, tissues or toilet paper to absorb all of the fluid (and swabs if present). Collect these and dispose in the same way that you would dispose of a used tissue or dental floss. Wash your hands and use the alcohol wipe provided to wipe down the affected surfaces. The risk from the liquid contents of the vial is minimal. The risk of catching COVID-19 (or any other infectious disease) from the sample is extremely low. If a substantial amount of fluid is missing, it may not be possible to process that sample at the testing facility.

### **7. What do I do if some of the fluid gets into contact with my skin or clothes?**

In case of skin contact, wash with copious amounts of water. Remove contaminated clothing and wash as normal. Remove shoes and remove any excess liquid as above. No further action is required.

### **8. Once the sample tube has been closed, can it be re-opened (for example if someone is late in performing their swab)?**

No, please do not close and then re-open the tube. This increases the risk of liquid being splashed.

### **9. If someone is running late, can we leave the tube open. If so for how long?**

We would advise not leaving the tube open for too long, to reduce the risk of accidental spillage.

### **10. In which room/space should swabs be placed in the sample tube?**

If the testing pool comprises a single household, this should be in a shared area (such as kitchen or bathroom) belonging to that household. If the testing pool comprises multiple households, the sample tube should be in a kitchen or bathroom (shared or unshared) belonging to one of the households in the pool. Remember to take care to ensure that social distancing is maintained throughout.

**11. Do I still perform the screening test if I have symptoms or should I book a separate appointment?**

This depends on your symptoms. Students with the most common symptoms of COVID-19 (a high temperature, a new continuous cough or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste) should not be swabbed as part of asymptomatic screening. Instead, they should arrange for an urgent appointment in the [university testing pods](#) (or, if these are not available, via [NHS testing facilities](#)).

**12. What happens if I am not in my household on the day of testing?**

We would strongly recommend discussion among your testing pool in advance of the swabbing day to find the most suitable time for everyone to take their swabs. For many households, that will be first thing in the morning prior to any teaching commitments or other activities. If students are not available at that time, for any reason, unfortunately no alternative testing can be provided that day, but we would encourage participation the following week. Students not present in Cambridge will not be able to take part in the programme.

**13. Will pooled sample collection itself carry a risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission?**

In theory, exposure to SARS-CoV-2 during pooled sample collection could arise because of: interruption of social distancing during pooled sample collection; contact with or spillage of a pooled sample; accidental contact with another student's swab or plastic wrapper (used for transport of the swab). However, the protocol for pooled sample collection has been specifically designed by Infectious Diseases clinicians to ensure that all of these risks will be effectively mitigated. In particular, it ensures that social distancing is maintained throughout, and includes contingency plans for unlikely events such as spillage or accidental contact with sample of swabs. Since social distancing is maintained, pooled sample collection will not result in significant mixing of College households, and any residual risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission will certainly be far lower than the "background" risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2 during "normal" student life. We estimate that the absolute risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission from pooled sample collection will be no more than 1 in 100,000, and very likely less than 1 in 1,000,000. This is far, far lower than the "background" risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2.

**14. Where can I find out more information?**

Information about the programme can be found on the University website, here:

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus/stay-safe-cambridge-uni/asymptomatic-covid-19-screening-programme>

Additional information will be provided by your Colleges, including specific details about the way this screening programme is being implemented locally.

If you have any questions that are not answered in this document, on the website or via your College, please contact us at [asymptomatic-queries@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:asymptomatic-queries@admin.cam.ac.uk)

**Thank you for helping us keep Cambridge safe!**