



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY Public Health Laboratory

Phone: (805) 781-5507 Fax: (805) 781-1023 www.sloPublicHealth.org/lab

SPECIMEN COLLECTION & TRANSPORT INSTRUCTIONS

Vesicular Rash

Specimen Collection Procedure for Varicella-Zoster (Chickenpox) and Poxvirus PCR Testing

I. Specimen Collection:

NOTE: If smallpox (Variola virus) is suspected consult the SLO Public Health Department (781-5500) to determine the level of risk associated with the patient and the level of precautions to be used in handling clinical specimens.

Collect appropriate specimens to confirm the cause of infection in patients presenting with acute vesicular or pustular rash illness. Testing can be performed by the SLO Public Health Laboratory to confirm VZV, or non-smallpox poxvirus, and/or to rule out Variola virus infection (smallpox) as the cause of infection. Collect specimen as soon as possible after illness onset.

A. Preferred Specimens:

- **Scabs:** If lesions have crusted over, scabs provide an excellent source of viral DNA. Lift scab from skin using the beveled point of a 26-gauge needle. Transfer scab to sterile container. Do not place in transport medium. Transport at ambient temperature.
- **Swabs:** Unroof a vesicle using a sterile 26-gauge needle. Using a sterile swab, scrub the base of the lesion vigorously enough to ensure that cells from the lesion are collected. Place swab, (breaking off stick if necessary) into a sterile tube or container. Do not place in transport medium. Transport specimen at ambient temperature.

B. Acceptable Specimens:

- While a dry swab is preferred, the SLOPHL will accept a specimen collected on a swab placed in viral transport media and refrigerated (M4 or equivalent, VTM).

II. Rejection Criteria:

- Incomplete specimen labeling/documentation
- Improperly stored specimens.

III. Documentation of specimen:

- Fill out the San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory Requisition, including the test requested (VZV PCR, and/or Orthopox PCR)
- Put the patient's full name and date of collection on specimen and specimen source.

IV. Storage of Clinical Specimens:

Scabs and swabs of lesions should be stored at ambient temperature. Swabs in VTM should be refrigerated.

V. Shipping of Clinical Specimens:

Clinical specimens should be shipped at ambient temperature in appropriate packaging.

Deliver to: San Luis Obispo Public Health Laboratory, 2191 Johnson Ave, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401