



The Collection of a stool (faeces) sample

Information for patients from the Department of Laboratory Medicine

Why do I have to collect this sample?

Your GP or another healthcare professional may ask you to collect a stool sample to help them diagnose a health condition or to rule one out. Stools contain bacteria and other substances that are present in the digestive system. By measuring the amounts of these substances and identifying bacteria in your stools, healthcare professionals can work out whether there are problems in your digestive system.

What should I do before I collect my sample?

Please read and follow all the instructions you are given before collecting your sample.

Your doctor or nurse will give you a sterile blue container for your sample (see photo). Please make sure that you label this with your first name, surname, and date of birth using a biro (if not already completed by your healthcare professional). If you know your NHS number, then please also write this on the container.

You will also need a clean, dry, wide-mouth container (for example an empty plastic food container or a potty) or some plastic wrap and some clean newspaper, a bin bag, and soap and water.



How do I collect my sample?

- Place the plastic container or potty in the toilet bowl. Alternatively, place clean newspaper or plastic wrap across the toilet seat opening (if the stool is very watery this may not be possible).
- Pass the stool into the potty, plastic container, or onto the newspaper or plastic wrap. Make sure it does not touch the inside of the toilet.
- Transfer small scoopfuls of the stool into the blue specimen container using the spoon built into the lid of the specimen container. Try to make sure that any parts of the stool which look bloody, slimy, or watery are put in the specimen container as well as some solid material. If possible try not to mix urine with the stool sample – do not worry if this is not possible.
- Do not overfill the specimen container. A walnut-sized amount, or a third of the container, is enough for testing.
- Put on the specimen container lid and screw on tightly. If the outside of the container has got dirty, clean the outside with soap and warm water.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water, then dry them.
- Flush the stool left in the potty, plastic container, newspaper, or plastic wrap down the toilet. If you have used newspaper, plastic wrap, or a disposable plastic container wrap them up in newspaper and then tie in a bin bag to go in your outside bin. If you have used a potty clean it with your usual toilet cleaner. Make sure the potty is clean and dry before you use it again.
- Write the date and time on the specimen container. Place the specimen container in the plastic bag attached to the laboratory request form and make sure that the bag is properly sealed.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water, then dry them.

What do I do with the sample when I have finished?

- Make sure the lid is done up tightly and the details on the label are filled in.
- Take the sample and the test request form to your GP surgery or to the pathology laboratory at your nearest East Kent Hospital as soon as possible. If it is impossible to deliver the sample on the same day, keep it somewhere dry and away from heat or direct sunlight. Do not refrigerate.
- Samples can be taken to pathology at the William Harvey Hospital (WHH), Ashford, Kent and Canterbury Hospital (K&C), or Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital (QEQM), Margate, between 8.30 am and 7.30 pm, Monday to Friday.

Please follow these instructions carefully. Failure to do so will make it difficult for your doctor to interpret the results and you may have to do it again.

Who do I tell if I have got a problem?

New specimen containers are available from the pathology laboratories at WHH, K&C, QEQM, or from your GP surgery. Please discuss any problems with sample collection with your healthcare professional.

How will I find out my results?

The results of your test will be sent back to the doctor who requested the test. Most results will be available within one to two weeks but some may take up to six weeks.

Where can I get further information?

- If you have any further queries about why this test is being done, please speak to the doctor who requested your test.
- If you have practical questions about your sample collection, please phone the Duty Biochemist on 01233 616287. Laboratory staff cannot discuss your results.

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145 or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation