



n a t i o n a l • p a t h o l o g y • g r o u p

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

16 April 2020

Dear colleagues,

**STATEMENT ON THE USE OF SINGLE NASO- OR OROPHARYNGEAL SWAB FOR SARS-CoV-2 PCR**

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) recently updated their sampling recommendations to include the use of a single nasopharyngeal swab or an oropharyngeal swab for the diagnosis of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>.

The National Pathology Group (NPG) supports this recommendation as it is in line with US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance<sup>2</sup> while South Africa continues to face restricted availability of essential supplies required for the diagnosis of COVID-19, including swabs.

There is no compelling evidence for a significantly increased sensitivity of a combination of naso- and oropharyngeal swabs over the use of a single swab<sup>3</sup>. Limited studies have found the yield of nasopharyngeal swabs to be higher compared to oropharyngeal swabs<sup>3,4</sup> and the NPG therefore advises the use of a single nasopharyngeal swab over a single oropharyngeal swab where possible.

We also want to reiterate that samples taken from the lower respiratory tract such as sputum, tracheal aspirate and bronchoalveolar lavage are preferred over swabs in patients who present with lower respiratory tract disease.

Yours sincerely,

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References:

1. [https://i9z5g3w2.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Quick-reference-y12-09.04.2020\\_final-1.pdf](https://i9z5g3w2.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Quick-reference-y12-09.04.2020_final-1.pdf)
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>
3. <https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/comparative-accuracy-of-oropharyngeal-and-nasopharyngeal-swabs-for-diagnosis-of-covid-19/>
4. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2001737>.