PROCEDURE

Procedure for collecting a throat swab for bacterial culture (may also be ordered as pharynx/pharyngitis culture, group A *Streptococcus* culture, strep throat culture, *Arcanobacterium* tonsillitis) and/or Antibiotic Resistant Organism (ARO) screening.

**Policy Statements**

Obtaining a throat swab requires a prescriber’s order or must be indicated as part of the Admission Form and Requisition for Antibiotic-Resistant Organisms (Form 00083786).

A physical assessment must be completed and documented in the patient’s chart. While a throat swab may be indicated, application of clinical judgment is required to determine safety of collecting the specimen. Never attempt to obtain a throat swab if the patient is at high risk for upper airway obstruction or if epiglottitis is suspected. Throat swabs are to be avoided under the following circumstances:

- Severe respiratory distress
- Moderate or severe croup
- History of aspiration
- C-spine precautions
- Post ENT surgery
- Post tongue or palate surgery
- Facial fractures
- Thrombocytopenia
- Severe mucositis

**SITE APPLICABILITY**

Applicable in all clinical areas within BCCH, SHHC, Women’s and Mental Health.

**PRACTICE LEVEL/COMPETENCIES**

Performing a throat swab is a foundational nursing competency.

**EQUIPMENT**

**GATHER** equipment:

- Personal protective equipment - PPE (gloves, gown, goggles, mask)
- Sterile tongue depressor (PS #00023995)
- Flashlight
- Sterile culture swab (viral and/or bacterial as appropriate). Use bacterial swab (PS #00022871) for ARO swabs
- Transport medium tube as appropriate
- Requisition and label
### PROCEDURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>For bacterial culture: <strong>CHECK</strong> chart for prescriber’s order. For ARO screening: <strong>CHECK</strong> ARO Admission Form and Requisition to confirm that specimen collection is required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>CHECK</strong> the patient’s chart to confirm that a physical assessment has been completed and documented, and that a throat swab is not contraindicated.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td><strong>IDENTIFY</strong> patient and <strong>EXPLAIN</strong> procedure.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td><strong>PERFORM</strong> hand hygiene and <strong>DON</strong> PPE.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>With the patient’s head tilted back and the throat illuminated. If necessary, <strong>DEPRESS</strong> the tongue with tongue depressor so that the back of the throat is visible. <strong>ASK</strong> patient to say &quot;ah&quot;. For infants and young children hold both arms over the head to reduce head movement. Tongue depressor may not be needed if patient is crying with mouth wide open.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Carefully <strong>INSERT</strong> the swab into the oropharynx and <strong>ROTATE</strong> the swab gently but firmly around both tonsils (if present) and the pharynx. If bacterial culture focus on areas that are red, patchy white or contain exudate. Avoid the teeth, gums, tongue and cheeks to prevent contamination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><strong>INSERT</strong> the swab into the appropriate culture tube/medium and recap the tube. <strong>CRUSH</strong> the ampoule at midpoint if using this type of culture kit and make sure the specimen is in contact with the medium.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td><strong>REMOVE</strong> equipment and PPE and <strong>DISPOSE</strong> appropriately. <strong>PERFORM</strong> hand hygiene.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td><strong>ATTACH</strong> label to container and <strong>COMPLETE</strong> requisition noting date and time of collection, swab site and if patient is on any antibiotics that could affect the results.</td>
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</table>

**NOTE:** indicate on requisition if there is a diagnosis of
any of the following: recurrent infection, rash, immunosuppression or Cystic Fibrosis.

10. **ARRANGE** for specimen transport to lab immediately. If immediate transport is not possible, store specimen in refrigerator and arrange for transport as soon as possible.

**DOCUMENTATION**

**DOCUMENT** on appropriate records:
- date and time of collection
- swab site
- appearance of throat
- patient response to procedure

**REFERENCES**


