



UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
HOSPITAL

ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Procedure Change
Gram Stain No Longer Performed on Single Swabs

EFFECTIVE 4-13-09 Specimens received as a single swab will not be processed for Gram stain.

GRAM STAINS provide essential information for many specimens; however, a single swab provides insufficient material to process both a gram stain and a culture.

NOTE: Gram stains prepared from swabs under-represent the bacteria which may be present

CULTURES obtained from swabs are insensitive to detect bacteria.

- Out of every 100 bacteria on a swab, only 3 make it to culture.
- The best specimens are “collected with metal.” Use scalpels, needles or syringes.
 - Good Specimens: Tissue in large-mouth sterile container.
Fluid or pus in original syringe (capped), or white top blood collection tube.
 - Bad Specimens: Specimens collected with a swab*.
Do not place tissue or fluid into a swab tube/device.

When a swab is unavoidable, send one swab for gram stain and another for each procedure requested (one swab for routine culture, one swab for fungal culture).

Swabs for anaerobic culture must be placed in Anaerobic Transport Medium (Lawson#100884)

* Swabs are acceptable for screens, e.g., group A strep screen, MRSA screens, etc.

Please call Clinical Laboratory Microbiology at 720-848-7047 if you have any questions or visit our website at <http://clinlab.uch.edu> for additional information.

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