

Procedure for requesting urgent microbiology tests at St George's Hospital

Background

Microbiology laboratory services for St George's Hospital are provided by South West London Pathology. The SWLP microbiology laboratory is based on 1st floor, Jenner Wing. The laboratory operates 7 days a week and a member of staff is available 24 hours a day either via x5689 or pager SG394. The telephone is answered Monday to Friday 0900-1730 and Saturday 0900-1200. Contact with the laboratory is via the pager at all other times.

Normal laboratory hours for microbiology (excluding viral serology – see below) are:

08:00 to 20:30 Monday to Sunday# (including bank holidays)

During these times, routine work is carried out with results available within agreed turnaround times (see [SWLP website](#) or [SWLP user handbook](#)). Processing of samples arriving outside these times or close to 20:30 may not start until the following day unless the following procedure is completed.

Urgent and out-of-hours testing

For more urgent tests (ie same day results) or anything outside of these hours, the following tests are available on discussion with the laboratory:

- Cerebrospinal fluids (CSFs): microscopy and set up for culture
- CSF: cryptococcal antigen
- Urine microscopy and set up for culture (paediatric)
- Pus samples (not swabs) for microscopy
- Tissues / fluids / aspirates (including ascitic, joint, and CAPD fluid microscopy)
- Corneal scrape
- Throat swabs from cases of possible meningococcal disease
- Rapid influenza testing (GeneXpert) for Infection Control purposes
- Rapid norovirus testing (GeneXpert) for Infection Control purposes

Viral serology is performed Monday to Friday, 09:00-17:00 and 09:00 and 12:00 on Saturday. Certain viral serology is available outside these hours on discussion with virology medical staff (x5686/7 or duty microbiology registrar out-of-hours via hospital switchboard):

- Blood-borne virus serology (HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C), eg for unbooked pregnant mothers in labour
- VZV IgG (for determination of immunity to chickenpox following exposure)

Any other testing **must** be discussed and approved by microbiology medical staff (x5685 or duty registrar out-of-hours via switchboard). Certain tests eg those referred to external laboratories cannot be performed urgently.

Procedure for any urgent and ALL out-of-hours microbiology testing

Please be aware that the laboratory is extremely busy and processes a high volume of samples 24 hours a day. There are only two members of staff available after 2030. Only send microbiology tests outside normal hours if it is essential for patient care.

For **all** urgent tests (ie same day results) or anything outside normal laboratory hours, samples must be either hand delivered directly to the central pathology reception or sent via the air tube system to 111 (preferred). In **all** cases, the duty microbiology biomedical scientist (BMS) **must** be informed (x5689 or pager SG394) about the sample and contact details of the requesting clinician for results should be provided.



If the sample is to be hand delivered, come to central pathology reception, ground floor, Jenner Wing (see photos) and ring the bell. **Do not** just leave the sample at reception. When a member of laboratory staff attends, politely state that the sample is urgent for microbiology and request a red bag (see photo). Place the labelled sample in the red bag and ask for it to be sent up to microbiology as soon as possible. If not already done, inform the duty microbiology BMS that the sample has been delivered to the laboratory.

The laboratory will endeavour to process the sample as quickly as possible.



Contacts:

Microbiology laboratory: x5689
Duty BMS: pager SG394
Microbiologist: x5685 Virologist: x5686/7
Out-of-hours duty microbiology registrar: via switchboard