Nasopharyngeal Swab Procedure

Background

Nasopharyngeal swabs are used for the detection of respiratory viruses such as RSV, influenza virus A & B or parainfluenza virus. A properly collected viral swab (one nare is sufficient) is necessary for detection of these organisms.

a) Assemble supplies:
   - Universal Transport Medium (UTM) Kit (red top viral transfer container). Check expiry date.
   - Personal protection equipment (i.e., mask, gloves, eye protection, gowns). Requisition and label, biohazard bag. Note: if no red top UTM Kits are available the blue top viral transfer may be used.

b) Explain procedure to resident/patient.

c) Wash hands. Put on appropriate personal protective equipment (at a minimum, gloves and facemask) to protect yourself in case the patient/resident coughs or sneezes while you are collecting the specimen.

d) If the patient/resident has a lot of mucous in his/her nose, this can interfere with the collection of cells. Ask the patient/resident to use a tissue to gently clean out visible nasal mucous before a swab is taken. Influenza viruses are located in cells that line the surface of the inner nose. The virus is not found in the mucous discharge.

e) Seat resident/patient in a comfortable bed. It is best if the patient is placed in a high-fowler's position in bed with the back of the head supported. It may be necessary to have a second person available to assist with collection.

f) Swab Collection

Nasopharyngeal Swab

   - Enter a flexible swab several centimeters with a slow, steady motion along the floor of the nose (straight back, not up the nose) until the posterior nasopharynx has been reached (distance from nostrils to external opening of ear)
   - Place finger on the tip of the patient/resident's nose and depress slightly
   - Once resistance is met (the swab should pass into the pharynx relatively easily), rotate the swab several times and withdraw the swab

   g) Break off top of swab (it will snap off)
   h) Place in transport medium.
   i) Remove personal protective equipment, wash hands.
   j) Ensure the specimen is labeled and transport to the laboratory with completed requisition.

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