Obtaining a wound culture specimen

By Jill Rushing, RN, MSN

YOU MAY OBTAIN A CULTURE SPECIMEN from an infected wound to identify the causative organism and help determine the most effective therapy. Use appropriate technique, usually the Z-stroke swab culturing technique shown here.

**DO**
- Review the health care provider’s order for obtaining the wound culture.
- Gather supplies to clean the wound, obtain the specimen, and redress the wound.
- Provide privacy. Confirm the patient’s identity and explain the procedure.
- Position and drape the patient.
- Perform hand hygiene and put on clean gloves. Remove the dressing, dispose of the gloves and dressing, and perform hand hygiene.
- Assess the wound and surrounding tissue.
- Arrange supplies on a sterile field. Put on clean gloves and thoroughly rinse the wound with sterile saline solution. Remove the gloves, perform hand hygiene, and put on clean gloves.
- To collect the specimen, swab the wound by gently rotating a sterile calcium alginate or rayon swab between your fingers. Swab the wound from margin to margin in a 10-point zigzag fashion. Use enough pressure to express fluid from within the wound tissue.
- Place the swab in the culture medium, label it according to your facility’s policies and procedures, and send it to the lab as soon as possible.
- Redress the wound as ordered. Take off gloves and perform hand hygiene.
- Document the procedure, your assessment findings, and the patient’s response.

**DON’T**
- Don’t take a specimen from exudate or eschar.
- Don’t use a cotton-tipped swab.
- Don’t let the sterile swab touch your fingers or other objects.

**RESOURCES**

Jill Rushing is a nursing instructor at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. Richard L. Pullen, Jr., RN, EdD, a member of the Nursing2007 editorial advisory board, coordinates Clinical Do’s & Don’ts, which illustrates key clinical points for a common nursing procedure. Because of space constraints, it’s not comprehensive.