

# Best Practice: Swabbing of Ulcers and Wounds for Bacterial Culture

The diagnosis of infection is clinical and is likely to be present if the ulcer contains obvious purulent material (not just slough) or there is redness, swelling or warmth surrounding.

Cultures, although often requested, are frequently unhelpful and may only show colonizing organisms unless taken from the base after debridement. The following gives instructions on how to take a swab.



**1. The wound should be cleaned with normal sterile saline before taking a wound swab to:**

- Remove stale exudate,
- Remove dressing residue,
- Remove surface bacterial contamination.



**2. Moisten the swab** with sterile normal saline if the wound surface is dry for a higher capture rate of bacteria.



**3. When taking swab:**

- Avoid areas of necrosis and slough,
- Avoid pooled exudate,
- Avoid the surrounding skin,
- Sample the undermined margins,
- Sample the base of the wound.



**4. When taking swab:**

- Rotate swab between fingers, use a zig-zag motion to sample the wound surface.