Physicians rely on laboratory tests to help diagnose and treat medical conditions. Most laboratory tests are performed on blood; however, samples of urine, feces, sputum, or even breath can provide useful results. The samples are collected and analyzed by professionals who are educated and trained to perform testing using sophisticated equipment and techniques.

Questions about what and why tests are being performed should be answered by your physician; however, there is an excellent website for additional information: labtestsonline.org. This website offers information about laboratory tests and provides good questions to ask your physician.

**Before the Blood Test**

Some tests may be performed in your physician’s office or you may be referred to an IU Health Patient Service Center. The Patient Service Center has more extensive testing capabilities than a physician’s office. Your physician will explain which facility is a better one for you. You should receive a written order for the tests to be performed. If you are sent to a Patient Service Center, be sure to bring the test order, your insurance card, and a photo ID.

Special preparation may be required before you arrive for your laboratory test collection. Your physician will tell you how to prepare for your blood test. It is important to follow all instructions to maintain the integrity of your test results.

When you arrive at the Patient Service Center, please ask any questions you may have and discuss any concerns with the phlebotomist or staff.

**During the Blood Collection**

Blood is usually drawn from a vein in your arm or back of the hand. The phlebotomist will ask you to state your name and date of birth. This is to ensure that the labels placed on your samples are properly identified. Please tell the phlebotomist if you faint easily or need to lie down for the procedure. A band will be placed on your arm to assist the phlebotomist in locating a vein best suited for the collection. The area identified for the collection will be sterilized with a swab in a circular motion. The phlebotomist will select the needle most appropriate to obtain the blood sample. On rare occasions the use of a butterfly needle is necessary, as when drawing from the hand or with infants. The needle will be inserted into the vein to allow the blood to flow into the appropriate tubes for collection. The band will be removed once all of the tubes have been filled. Next the needle will be removed and a piece of gauze will be placed over the collection site. You will be instructed to apply gentle but firm pressure on site to stop the bleeding, prevent swelling, and bruising. The phlebotomist will then label the tubes.

**After the Blood Collection**

After the tubes are labeled, the phlebotomist will check the collection site to ensure all bleeding as stopped. Once the bleeding has stopped the phlebotomist will apply a bandage. The bandage is advised to be worn for 20-30 minutes to ensure no post-collection bleeding or bruising occurs.

**Other Types of Samples**

Laboratory tests can be done on various other body fluids and samples, such as urine, sputum, feces, or breath. You may be instructed to take a collection container home with you to collect a single sample or multiple samples.

**Laboratory Test Results**

Results can take a few minutes or several days depending upon the type of test your physician has ordered. Results are made available to your physician and he/she will discuss the results with you and explain any treatment or follow up that may be needed.