Lab Testing Basics
One of the most important jobs a veterinary technician performs is venipuncture (drawing blood) for running laboratory tests. It is important to know about the different laboratory tubes and what samples they are used for. Hematology is the study of the blood elements (red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets). This PowerPage discusses the different blood tubes and important points to know.

Blood Chemistry
- **Whole blood** - fluid component is plasma. Blood cell constituents are leukocytes (white blood cells), erythrocytes (red blood cells), and thrombocytes (platelets).
- **Plasma** - the fluid part of the whole blood. Plasma is about 90% water and 10% proteins, carbs, vitamins, hormones, fats, salts, enzymes, and wastes.
- **Serum** is plasma that has had fibrinogen removed.

Purple/Lavender-Top Tube
- Contains EDTA as the anti-coagulant. It prevents coagulation by binding to calcium ions (calcium is required for clotting).
- Cell constituents are stable for up to 24 hours in a purple-top tube.
- This is the tube used for running a complete blood count (CBC), hematocrit/packed cell volume, reticulocyte count (immature erythrocytes), or any counts of the aforementioned cells.
- Purple tops are also used for collecting fluid that may clot from body cavities in which cell counts need to be performed. This may include cerebrospinal fluid, peritoneal or pleural effusions, and synovial fluid.
- These samples are not centrifuged because there is no clot to be separated.

Plain Red-Top Tube
- **Glass tubes have no additive**; plastic tubes have clot activators.
- Red-Top Tubes are used in immunology and in most serologic tests such as chemistry panels.
- These can also be used as a sterile tube for collecting samples for culture such as urine.
Speckled Red-Top Tube (Tiger Top)
- **Serum separator tubes** - contains a clot activator and gel for serum separation.
- Used for **chemistry panels** and are used to check any laboratory value seen on these panels and other tests requiring a serum sample. This is the majority of tests (BUN, creatinine, ALT, ALP, triglycerides, cholesterol, electrolytes, etc.).

Light Blue-Top Tube
- Contains **Sodium citrate** - citrate is an anti-coagulant that binds calcium in the blood.
- For accuracy, **these tubes must be completely filled to recommended level**. The appropriate ratio is 9 parts blood to 1 part citrate.
- Used to check for coagulation disorders which may include testing of Prothrombin time (PT), Partial Thromboplastin Time (PTT), Fibrin Degradation Products (FDP), D-dimer, von Willebrand Factor, and other factor and fibrinolysis assays.

Green-Top Tube
- Green tops are **plasma separator tubes (PST)**.
- These tubes contain **heparin** - heparin activates antithrombins, which block coagulation.
- Produces a whole blood/plasma sample and is used for collecting a plasma sample.

Gray-Top Tube
- These tubes contain **sodium fluoride**, which is best known as a glucose preservative, and some contain potassium oxalate.
- Used most often if an accurate glucose measurement is needed and sample processing will be delayed. A blood glucose tested from serum in a red- or tiger-top tube in a delayed sample will be falsely low due to ongoing glucose metabolism by red blood cells in the tube.

Reference: