



Standard Practice for Determining Microbial Colony Counts from Waters Analyzed by Plating Methods¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D 5465; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 These practices cover recommended procedures for counting colonies and reporting colony-forming units (CFU) on membrane filters (MF) and standard pour and spread plates.

1.2 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety problems, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Significance and Use

2.1 These practices provide a uniform set of counting, calculating, and reporting procedures for ASTM test methods in microbiology.

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2.2 The counting rules provide a best attainable estimate of microorganisms in the sample, since the samples cannot be held and reanalyzed at a later date.

3. Hazards

3.1 The analyst/technician must know and observe the normal good laboratory practices and safety procedures required in a microbiology laboratory while preparing, using, and disposing of cultures, reagents, and materials.

PRACTICE A—COUNTING COLONIES ON MEMBRANE FILTERS

4. Procedure

4.1 The grid lines help in counting the colonies. Count them for the organism of interest following a preset plan such as that shown in Fig. 1. Some colonies will be in contact with the grid lines. A suggested procedure for reducing error in counting is shown in Fig. 2. Count the colonies in the squares indicated by the arrows.

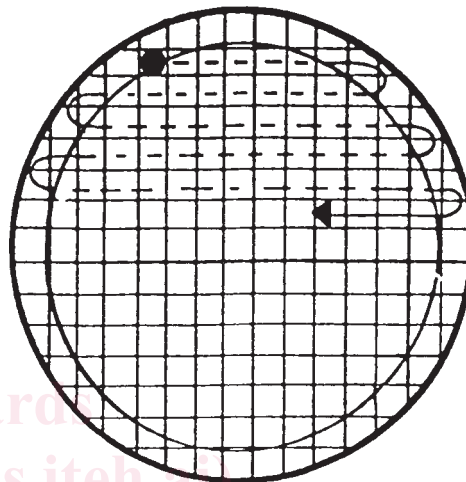


FIG. 1 Colony Counting Pathway (The Inner Circle Indicates the Effective Filtering Area; the Dashed Line Indicates the Pathway)

4.2 The fluorescent lamp tube should be nearly parallel with and directly over the membrane filter. Ideally, the lamp is attached to and surrounds the objective nosepiece of the stereoscopic microscope. Count the colonies individually, even if they are in contact with each other. The technician must learn to recognize the difference between two or more colonies that

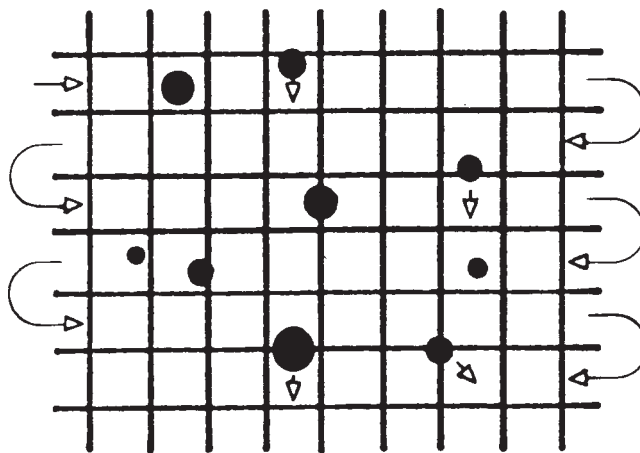


FIG. 2 Enlarged Portion of Grid-Marked Square of Filter (Colonies in Contact with Gridlines are Counted in Squares Indicated by the Arrow)

¹ These practices are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D-19 on Water and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D19.24 on Water Microbiology. Current edition approved Sept. 15, 1993. Published November 1993.

have grown into contact with each other and the single, irregularly shaped colonies that sometimes develop on membrane filters. The latter colonies are usually associated with a fiber or particulate material and conform to the shape and size of the fiber or particulates. Colonies that have grown together almost invariably show a very fine line of contact.

4.3 Count the colonies with a stereoscopic (dissecting) microscope that provides a magnification of at least 10 to 15×.

4.4 See Table 1 for guidance on acceptable counting limits.

4.5 *Calculation of Results*—Select the membrane with the number of CFU in the acceptable range and calculate the count/reporting volume according to the following general formulae:

$$\text{CFU/mL} = \frac{\text{colonies counted}}{\text{volume of sample filtered in mL}} \times 1 \quad (1)$$

$$\text{CFU/100 mL} = \frac{\text{colonies counted}}{\text{volume of sample filtered in mL}} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

4.6 *Counts Within the Acceptable Limits:*

4.6.1 The acceptable range of counts on a membrane for samples that are diluted is a function of the organism/test combination as given in Table 1.

4.6.2 Assume that the filtration of volumes of 80, 20, 5, and 1 mL produced counts of 250, 60, 15, and 4, respectively. Do not count the colonies on all filters. Select the MF(s) within the acceptable counting range and then limit the actual counting to such membranes. After selecting the best MF for counting, in this case that with a 60-CFU count, the analyst counts CFU according to the procedures shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 and applies the general formula as follows:

$$\frac{60}{20} \times 1 \text{ (or } \times 100) = 3 \text{ (or 300)} \quad (3)$$

Report as 3 CFU/mL or 300 CFU/100 mL.

4.6.3 If there are acceptable counts on replicate plates, carry the counts independently to final reporting units, and then calculate the arithmetic mean of these counts to obtain the final reported value. For example, 1 mL volumes produced counts of 26 and 36 CFU/mL or counts of 2600 and 3600 CFU/100 mL:

$$\frac{26 + 36}{2} = 31 \quad (4)$$

Report as 31 CFU/mL.

$$\frac{2600 + 3600}{2} = 3100 \quad (5)$$

Report as 3100 CFU/100 mL.

4.6.4 If more than one dilution produced acceptable counts, count the colonies for each dilution, carry the counts indepen-

dently to final reporting units, and then average for the final reported value. For example, assume that volumes of 0.3, 0.1, 0.03, and 0.01 mL produced colony counts of too numerous to count (TNTC), 75, 30, and 8, respectively. In this example, two volumes, 0.1 and 0.03, produce colonies in an acceptable counting range. Carry each MF count independently to a count/mL or count/100 mL:

$$\frac{75}{0.1} \times 1 \text{ (or } \times 100) = 750 \text{ CFU/mL (or 75 000 CFU/100 mL)} \quad (6)$$

$$\frac{30}{0.03} \times 1 \text{ (or } \times 100) = 1000 \text{ CFU/mL (or 100 000 CFU/100 mL)}$$

Then calculate the arithmetic mean of these counts to obtain the final reported value:

$$\frac{750 + 1000}{2} = 875 \quad (7)$$

Report as 880 CFU/mL.

$$\frac{75000 + 100000}{2} = 87500 \quad (8)$$

Report as 88 000 CFU/100 mL.

4.6.5 For finished drinking water samples only, countable membranes may contain from one colony to the upper limit of the test (see Table 1). Count the target colonies/volume filtered. Calculate and report the number of CFU/100 mL.

4.7 *Counts Outside Acceptable Limits:*

4.7.1 Zero counts recorded as < values/volume filtered are acceptable for sample volumes of 100 mL or more.

4.7.2 If full-volume samples are filtered, such as 25, 50, or 100 mL, and the resulting count is 1 to 19 colonies, these values are acceptable although <20. The count is adjusted to 1 or 100 mL for reporting. For example, a count of 1 colony/25 mL is adjusted:

$$\frac{1}{25} \times 1 \text{ (or } \times 100) = <1 \text{ (or 4)} \quad (9)$$

Report as <1 CFU/mL (or 4 CFU/100 mL).

4.7.3 If all MF counts are <20/volume filtered, select the most nearly acceptable count (for non-drinking waters). For example, assume a count in which sample volumes of 1, 0.3, and 0.01 mL produced CFU counts of 14, 3, and 0, respectively. No CFU count falls within recommended limits here. Calculate on the basis of the most nearly acceptable plate count, 14, and report with a qualifying remark:

$$\frac{14}{1.0} \times 1 \text{ (or } \times 100) = 14 \text{ (or 1400)} \quad (10)$$

Report as estimated count: 14 CFU/mL (or 1400 CFU/100 mL).

4.7.4 If counts from all membranes are zero, calculate using the count from largest filtration volume. For example, sample volumes of 25, 10, and 2 mL produced CFU counts of 0, 0, and 0, respectively, and no actual calculation is possible, even as an estimated report. Calculate the number of CFU per 100 mL that would have been reported if there had been one CFU on the filter representing the largest filtration volume; thus:

$$\frac{<1}{25} \times 1 \text{ (or } \times 100) = <0.04 \text{ (or } <4) \quad (11)$$

TABLE 1 Recommended Counting Range for High-Density Samples^A

Microorganism	Colony Count	Remarks
Total coliform bacteria, MF, 47 mm	20 to 80	Upper limit, 200 colonies of all types
Fecal coliform bacteria, MF, 47 mm	20 to 60	
Fecal streptococci, MF, 47 mm	20 to 100	
Heterotrophic spread plate count	20 to 200	
Heterotrophic pour plate count	30 to 300	Upper limit, 300

^AColony counts below or exceeding the limits cited above must be identified as outside of this range.