

Policy and Procedure for Specimen Transport



University Hospitals
Bristol and Weston
NHS Foundation Trust

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AUTHOR: POSITION: DATE:	Carolyn Perry Principal BMS Chemistry 7 th February 2025
APPROVED BY: POSITION: DATE:	Mark Woodward Pathology Health + Safety Lead 11 th February 2025

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1.0 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

- Specimen transportation systems are key factors in the delivery of an effective laboratory service and these instructions are intended to ensure the integrity of the sample and the safety of the carrier, the general public and the receiving laboratory minimising the risk of infection and injury.
- The scope includes the need to ensure the timely arrival of specimens at the correct destination within a time frame appropriate to the requested examination at minimum risk to both laboratory and non-laboratory personnel.
- This document describes transportation of samples to Laboratory Medicine at the Bristol Royal Infirmary from within the hospital by porters and other staff and from outside hospitals within University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust and from general practitioners.
- The laboratory is not involved in primary sample collection and transportation. This limits the responsibility of the laboratory to ensuring that on receipt of a primary sample whose integrity was compromised or which could have jeopardized the safety of the carrier or the general public, the sender is contacted immediately and informed about measures to be taken to eliminate recurrence.
- Basic information on sample transport requirements are provided at the point of collection through the order communications system, through the Pathology Test Information system and by contacting the laboratory. Some information may be built into specific care pathways.
- **Note:** As the laboratory is not involved in primary sample collection and transportation, a risk assessment has been carried out to ensure the transportation of samples meets the laboratories requirements and that the timeframes for transport are appropriate to the sample type, Document reference: **MF-GEN-BRI-SPECTRANSRA**

2.0 REFERENCES AND DEFINITIONS

2.1 REFERENCES

Link to Royal Mail requirements for sample transport

<http://www.royalmail.com/sites/default/files/Guidance-Document-Infectious-Substances-171012.pdf>

Trust Sharps policy

2.2 DEFINITIONS

N/A

3.0 POLICY AND/OR PROCEDURE

Specimen Transport within the BRI and Adjacent Hospitals Provided by Hospital Transport

- To prevent infection, samples are normally contained in leak resistant tubes or bottles that are placed within leak resistant plastic bags.
- **Additional risk of infection arises when:**
 - The outside of a sample container or its plastic bag is contaminated at source.
 - A sample leaks in transit.
 - A sample is dropped and breaks in transit.
 - A sample is dropped and its loss is not noticed.

Instructions to reduce additional risk

- **To minimise the chance of dropping specimens**, carry all specimens in a pathology collection trolley, transport box, or plastic carrier bag, **do not** carry by hand or place in a pocket. *Plastic carriers are available for emergency collections from clinics and wards in the porters lodge and pathology.*
- **If a specimen is found to be leaking on collection**, refuse to handle it, and inform the ward or department Sister/Manager.
- **If a specimen leaks on route**, tell the reception staff on returning to the laboratory. They will arrange for it to be cleaned up.
- **If a specimen is dropped** and the container breaks or leaks, **do not touch it**. Contact the laboratory (Ext 23080), or if on ward or clinic, inform Sister/Senior nurse. If no one is available to inform, try and protect the soiled area with chairs or other objects and call for assistance (e.g. Laboratory Medicine Reception or the main porter's lodge Ext 22631).
- **Van drivers** observing leaking specimens while in transit, cover the spill with absorbent material e.g. cotton wool or paper, and request the assistance of the laboratory on return to the hospital (Ext 23080). If a breakdown or an accident occurs do not allow anyone to touch the specimens unless they represent the Pathology directorate.

Additional Requirement for Public Transport (taxi)

- All specimens will be placed in screw capped plastic containers and placed inside a transport box that indicates the contents are pathological samples. The outside of the box will also be labelled to include contact details for the laboratory in case of loss of the sample or spillage.

Action in the Event of Personal Injury by a Sample or Needle stick

- If you suffer personal injury (e.g. cut yourself), and the wound might be contaminated with a leaking or spilled specimen, or if a specimen splashes in your eye, treat the incident as a sharps injury and immediately follow the trust procedure on [Safe Handling Disposal And Reporting Of Sharps And Bloodborne Viruses Exposure Injuries Policy](#)
- Stop what you are doing, wash the wound with soap and water (do not use antiseptics etc) and encourage bleeding if appropriate.
- Report the injury to University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust Occupational Health Service immediately using the **Needlestick Hotline on Tel: (0117) 342 4987.**
- During office hours you will be dealt with straight away. Out of office hours contact Switchboard on External Tel: (0117) 923 0000 or Internal Tel: 100.
- They will arrange for the Occupational Health Doctor on call to contact you and give the necessary advice.

Contacting the Sender of the Sample

- In the event of receiving a sample whose integrity was compromised or may have jeopardized the safety of the carrier or general public, the sender will be contacted immediately and informed about measures to be taken to eliminate recurrence. If indicated a clinical incident will be raised.

Protection of Samples from Deterioration and Reporting of Incidents

- Samples will be protected from deterioration by the provision of a regular collection service by a formal van collection and porters rounds during the day (details are available from specimen reception). Out of hours an air tube and a portering service are available. Additionally advice and facilities are available for the transport of samples on ice or those that need urgent separation. For samples that require rapid or special transport to the laboratory this can be arranged via the porters or in limited circumstances the laboratory staff will collect the sample.
- Sample collection routes are laid out in a formal timetable, see MF-GEN-BRI-CourierTimetable, which manages the length of time that any sample is in transit between the requesting location and the laboratory, with a target time of no longer than 3 hours between collection from the clinic / GP surgery and delivery to BRI.
- Training of hospital couriers is undertaken by the BRI Transport team, to ensure that drivers are aware of the requirements on them to comply with GDPR. Details of training records are held by the BRI transport team and are available upon request.
- Couriers are provided with H&S training, by the BRI transport team, to ensure that drivers are aware of the risks involved in handling patient samples, samples in Formalin and, if required, the transportation of liquid Nitrogen. Details of training records are held by the BRI transport team and are available upon request.
- Courier performance whilst visiting clinics and GP surgeries is monitored by the BRI transport team. Details of driver audits are held by the BRI transport team and are available upon request.
- Hospital couriers use padded transport bags to minimise the risk of damage to samples during transit.
- The transport bags used by Hospital couriers are checked for compliance with transport regulations by the Pathology H&S Lead, in conjunction with the transport team manager and by

annual DGSA inspections.

- Temperature monitoring is undertaken as part of the driver audits; these are scheduled to be conducted twice a year.
- Temperature monitoring data is reviewed by the Pathology H&S Lead and the Transport team manager, to check that the temperatures within the transport bag are $>2^{\circ}\text{C}$ and $<25^{\circ}\text{C}$ whilst holding samples, to avoid sample deterioration during transit.
- If the method in use for the transportation of samples is no longer deemed fit for purpose, the Pathology H&S Lead and Transport team manager will undertake to identify and employ a suitable alternative.

Regulatory Requirements

- The department undertakes to ensure that its procedures for the transportation of specimens shall meet all regulatory requirements.

Transport Container Bags and Absorbent Material

- All transport containers must contain absorbent material and a polythene bag in case of spillage. The containers will be checked daily by the specimen reception staff to make sure they all contain the bag and absorbent material and will replace them if required.