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# Amendment Procedure

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| **Controlled document title** | **SPECIMEN TRANSPORT AND HANDLING** |

Each controlled document has a separate record of amendments detailed in this Amendment Procedure.

On issue of revised or new pages each controlled document should be updated by the copyholder.

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**Department of Microbiology**

**Specimen Collection and Transport Policy**

**Collection of Bacteriology Specimens**

The objective of the Microbiology laboratory tests for bacterial infection is to isolate viable organisms therefore proper specimen collection and prompt transport arrangements are required.

The results of the laboratory are limited by the quality of the specimen and the condition on arrival in the laboratory. Errors in specimen collection and transport are the commonest reasons for failure to ascertain cause of infection.

Specimens should be collected from patients with care to minimize the possibility of introducing extraneous or contaminating microorganisms. This precaution is needed to distinguish commensal or ‘normal ‘flora from organisms causing infection. The presence of commensal flora at site of infection will mask the true aetiological agent making isolation more difficult.

The list below gives common sites of contamination from specimen sites which are adjacent to body sites having more resident normal flora than others.

**Site of Infection Source of contamination**

Middle Ear External ear canal

Nasal Sinus Nasopharynx

Lower respiratory tract Oropharynx

Endometrium Vagina

Superficial wounds/

Subcutaneous infection Skin and mucous membranes

Abdominal fistulae Gastrointestinal tract

Bladder Urethra and external genitalia

Careful skin antisepsis before collection procedures, such as blood cultures and lumbar punctures will decrease risk of false positive findings from contaminants normally present on the skin.

Specimens should be collected directly from normally sterile sites and body fluids by methods such as needle biopsy or aspiration or surgical biopsy.

If available, infected tissue or infected fluid is preferable to swab as this will contain more material.

Details of specimen collection procedures for all specimen sites can be found under separate headings in the user information(on the website). Specimens should be collected during the early (acute ) phase of an infection and before initiation of antimicrobial therapy.

Specimens should be transported to the laboratory as soon as possible. Some microorganisms ( e.g. Neisseria gonnorhoeae) survive for only a short time outside the body. To minimize the effects of specimen transport delay, swabs are collected into transport medium which prevent drying and minimise bacterial growth during transport. Boric acid containers are provided for urine specimens which also minimize bacterial growth.

**Collection of Virology Specimens**

Requirements for specimen containers for collection of blood for Serology and Molecular Virology testing sites can be found under separate headings in the user information(on the website) Once collected, blood samples must be transported to the Virology laboratory. Sample integrity is assured by checking the sample date on arrival and visual inspection for haemolysis after centrifugation. (see SOP MLPVS033 Page47). Also see SOP MLPVG009 Appendix A for sample handling and stability.

**Transport to the Laboratory from RD&E Locations**

**Microbiology specimens** can be sent to the laboratory using the pneumatic tube system. Please send to location 2900.

This location is in operation during routine opening hours of the laboratory. Out of hours please send specimens to the high throughput laboratory in A2 . These will be collected by portering staff and brought to Microbiology at regular intervals through the evening and night.

**If you require specimens to be sent urgently to the On Call technical staff out of hours please contact the on call Biomedical Scientist who will advise you on the best way to do this.**

**Collection from Primary Care**

RD&E trust provides transport services to all primary care sites which includes collection and delivery of Pathology specimens. Collection schedules are available from the RD&E transport department.

In the event of transport being unavailable, generally it is advisable to keep specimens at 4C until transported