
LABORATORY INSTRUCTION

Storage of Pathology Specimens **prior to collection by courier service**

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Background

Correct storage of pathology specimens is essential for the delivery of valid test results. Serum potassium levels can be artificially raised if the specimen is stored in a refrigerator while failure to refrigerate urine samples can cause artificially raised levels of 'contaminant' bacteria leading to potential inappropriate use of antibiotics. Some specimens must not be stored but immediately delivered to the laboratory.

Laboratory Instruction

Specimens which can be stored must be kept either at room temperature or refrigerated between 4°C and 8°C while awaiting collection by the approved courier. Approved couriers will transport refrigerated specimens to the laboratory in insulated, cooled bags.

Please store samples as recommended in the lists below.

Where samples will not be delivered to the laboratory on the same day as collection please see the recommended overnight storage list.

Some tests require specimens to be handled in special conditions following collection. This information is available in the investigation list or the appropriate departmental section in the Pathology Handbook. Please check if unsure and not on the lists below.

Specimens stored at Room Temperature

Blood samples (*some tests require special handling, see above*)

Blood culture samples

Swabs – all types

Nail clippings

Sputum

Thin Prep cervical samples

Tissue samples in formalin (*dry tissue samples require special handling, see above*)

24 hour urine collections

Urine specimens in green topped tubes

Specimens stored in a refrigerator

Faeces/Stool samples (*some tests require special handling, see above*)

Fluids – e.g. aspirates

Urine specimens in yellow topped tubes.

Urine specimens in universal tubes

Where possible patients should be encouraged to store yellow topped and universal tube urine specimens (not 24 hour collections) in their refrigerator if there is likely to be a delay between the specimen being collected and delivery to the hospital or surgery.

Overnight Storage Recommendations.

The following samples can be stored overnight when a delay in transportation to The laboratory has been unavoidable.

Nail clippings
Thin Prep cervical samples
Tissue samples in formalin
24 hour urine collections

The following samples can be stored overnight in a refrigerator when a delay in delivery to the laboratory has been unavoidable.

Urine specimens (yellow and green topped tubes, universal tubes)
Swabs – all types
Faeces/Stool samples (*some tests require special handling, see above*)
Fluids – e.g. aspirates
Sputum

The following blood samples (*some tests require special handling, see above*)

SST tube for Biochemistry tests – when tube **has been centrifuged**
EDTA tubes for FBC, Group and antibody screen
Red topped tubes for auto immune profile/ANA tests, viral serology tests.

The following samples are **not suitable** for overnight storage

SST tube for Biochemistry tests – when not centrifuged
Blue topped citrated samples for coagulation investigations
Red topped samples for Biochemistry investigations
Blood Cultures
EDTA tube for cell markers
Tests that require special sample handling, see above.