NORTH MEMORIAL HEALTH

# Microbiology Specimen Collection General Guidelines

Proper collection, transport and transfer of pertinent information for Microbiology specimens is absolutely necessary to ensure valid and useful test results for the provider. **Recognize that your role in this process is critical.** The laboratory cannot provide accurate or reliable results from improperly collected or transported specimens.

The following general considerations regarding the collection of material for culture are ***very important***. These factors will contribute to the successful isolation of the pathogen causing the infection:

1. Whenever possible, specimens should be obtained before antibiotics have been administered.
2. Collect the specimen where the suspected organisms is most likely to be found and with as little external contamination as possible. Be especially careful of skin and mucosal surfaces since they are populated with bacterial flora. The goal is to isolate the organisms causing the infection deep inside the wound, not surface bacteria around the wound site.
3. The stage of the disease at which the specimen is collected for culture is important. Enteric pathogens (Salmonella, Shigella) are present in much greater numbers during the acute, or diarrheal stage of intestinal infections and are more likely to be detected at that time. Blood cultures should be drawn whenever signs of septicemia occur (chills, fever, prostration).
4. Complete instructions should be given to customers and cooperation encouraged whenever they must participate actively in the collection of a specimen, such as urine or sputum.
5. Specimens should be sufficient in quantity and placed in tightly sealed sterile containers. If the outside of the container should become contaminated, wipe the outside of the container with a suitable disinfectant. All specimens must be placed in plastic biohazard bags.
6. Prompt delivery of specimens to the Laboratory is extremely important. The following list of specimens must be brought to the Laboratory STAT/ASAP to obtain reliable results. For off-site collection, special handling instructions must be followed, see individual procedure.

   a. Anaerobic cultures - Room Temp.
   b. Catheter cultures – Transport STAT
   c. CSF cultures – Transport STAT
   d. Sputum cultures - Refrigerate
   e. Stool specimens – Room Temp
   f. Ureaplasma/Mycoplasma – FREEZE ASAP
   g. Urine cultures – Refrigerate

   All other specimens collected for culture should be refrigerated until sent to the lab at your ***earliest*** convenience.
7. The Laboratory must be given sufficient clinical information to guide the microbiologist in the selection of appropriate media and techniques. Please include the complete source, not just wound or left leg. Include if it is surgical incision, a bite wound, a lesion, abscess, etc.
8. The specimen must be labeled with the following information.
   a. Customer's name
   b. Source (exact site, not just wound)
   c. Date/time (when specimen was collected)
   d. Collector's initials
   e. A second identifier such as date of birth (not room or bed number)
9. Susceptibility testing is automatically performed on all appropriate pathogens. If susceptibility testing for a specific antibiotic is desired, include it on the request.
10. If both a culture and a Gram stain are requested on swab specimens, two swabs are preferred.
11. If BBL CultureSwab transport medium is used:
    a. Peel open swab pack and discard plug.
    b. Collect specimen and insert swabs into transport tube.
    c. Label the actual CultureSwab transport tube, **not** the paper wrapper.