Policy on the collection, handling and transport of clinical specimens
Document Control Sheet

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Approvals

This document requires the following approvals either individual(s), group(s) or board.

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1. Introduction

This policy applies to all staff who are required to handle and transport specimens.

2. Purpose and scope

This policy is for all staff employed or contracted by East Coast Community Healthcare CIC, to enable them to understand the principles of safe collection, handling and transport of clinical specimens.

3. Policy Statement

This policy will be implemented to ensure adherence to safe practice.

4. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that they adhere to best practice.

5. Policy monitoring

It is the responsibility of all department heads/professional leads to ensure that the staff they manage adhere to this policy.

6. Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

7. Collection, handling and transport of clinical specimens.

7.1 Clinical specimens include any substance, solid or liquid, removed from the patient for the purpose of analysis.

7.2 Staff handling clinical specimens must have received instruction in the safe handling of specimens and must be immunised according to Occupational Health Policy.

7.3 Staff must only transport specimens in their vehicles in appropriate containers that are transported in the ‘boot’ compartment of their vehicle and must be trained in methods of dealing with specimen spillages. Spillage kits must be available for staff to use. Any accident or leakage must be instantly reported to a senior member of staff.

7.4 Leaking or incorrectly labelled specimens will routinely be discarded by the receiving laboratory. Specimens in inappropriate containers will be similarly discarded.

7.5 Clear (preferably written) instructions and laboratory approved containers should always be given to patients collecting their own specimens for laboratory examination. Patients should be encouraged to place their specimen container directly into an individual 'marsupial-type' plastic bag. If staff need to handle an unwrapped specimen container, they must wear disposable nitrile gloves.

7.6 When obtaining specimens, staff must use Standard Principles of Infection Control (i.e. wear appropriate personal protective equipment and wash and dry hands thoroughly before and after the procedure).
7.7 The request form accompanying the specimen should be placed in the separate pocket in the marsupial bag, preferably folded in a way to maintain confidentiality.
7.8 Specimens awaiting collection in healthcare settings should be kept in suitable containers, which are leak proof, robust and washable.
7.9 Urine specimens tested in the healthcare setting should not be discarded into sinks. They should be disposed of into a sluice, or lavatory, and the plastic universal containers, should be disposed of in a sharps bin rather than clinical waste sack.
7.10 In some instances, it will be necessary to attach yellow ‘High Risk’ stickers to samples and the accompanying request forms. These samples should also be double bagged into plastic transit bags to reduce the danger of leakage.

‘High Risk’ stickers should be used for all samples where the patients are known, or suspected to be, clinical cases/carriers of the following:

- Anthrax
- Brucella species
- Prion disease
- Blood borne virus infection (e.g. Hepatitis B/C/E, HIV)
- Mycobacterium tuberculosis
- Salmonella typhi
- Salmonella paratyphi
- Viral haemorragic fever*
- Slow viruses

*N.B. Patients with pyrexia of unknown origin, who have returned from Viral Haemorrhagic Fever (VHF) endemic areas within the last three weeks, should be assessed with this diagnosis in mind. If VHF is considered likely no specimens must be taken, or sent, without prior discussion with the receiving laboratory.

If there is any doubt about the hazard level of any specimens, the Microbiologist at the receiving laboratory should be contacted.

8. Transportation of clinical specimens by community staff

Community nurses and other practitioners may carry diagnostic specimens in their cars, on the road, as long as all of the following criteria are met:

- Specimens are safely contained within a correct and appropriate specimen container.
- Each specimen is no more than 500ml (liquid) or 500g (solid).
- The container is sealed within a sealed plastic specimen transport jar.
- The specimen is correctly labelled, including ‘Danger of Infection’ label if necessary.
- The request form is correctly completed and labelled as above if necessary.
- Specimens are contained within an outer packaging which must be compliant with The Carriage of Dangerous Goods Act 2004 - Packaging instruction 650.
- This outer packaging must:
- Be clearly labelled and durably marked with the words ‘DIAGNOSTIC SPECIMENS’
- Contain a total of no more than 4 litres (liquid) or 4 kg (solid).
- Should any substance be spilled or leak in a vehicle or container, it must not be used until appropriately decontaminated.

9. Urgent specimens (from community hospitals)

If a specimen is required to be tested urgently it can be sent by taxi in a designated container to the laboratory. However if it is a stool specimen that requires to be tested that day then the laboratory must be informed in advance that it is being sent and it must arrive no later than **12 noon**. If in doubt contact the infection prevention and control team for advice.

10. Author
Infection Prevention and Control Team

11. References:
HSE 2004 *Working with ADR: an introduction to the carriage of dangerous goods by road.* Health and Safety Executive, London.
ECE/Trans/160 Volumes 1 and 11 [www.unece.org](http://www.unece.org)