Transport of Pathology Specimens to Laboratories

Summary  The Policy Directive and Procedures ensure a consistent statewide approach to the safe and timely transport of all pathology and forensic specimens such that there is no deterioration in the quality of the specimen.

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Policy manual  Not applicable

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Status  Active

Functional group  Clinical/Patient Services - Governance and Service Delivery, Pathology

Applies to  Affiliated Health Organisations, Community Health Centres, Local Health Districts, NSW Health Pathology, Private Hospitals and day Procedure Centres, Public Hospitals, Specialty Network Governed Statutory Health Corporations

Distributed to  Ministry of Health, Public Health System

Audience  All clinical, Laboratory, Central specimen reception and transport staff involved in transport of pathology specimens

Secretary, NSW Health

This Policy Directive may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Compliance with this directive is mandatory for NSW Health and is a condition of subsidy for public health organisations.
TRANSPORT OF PATHOLOGY SPECIMENS TO LABORATORIES

PURPOSE

NSW Health Pathology provides specialist pathology services for NSW Health local health districts and specialty health networks, NSW Police, private pathology providers, community based medical practitioners and private hospitals.

This Policy Directive and the supporting procedures ensure a consistent statewide approach to the safe and timely transport of all pathology and forensic specimens so as to limit deterioration in the quality of the specimen and delay in testing.

This policy also applies to The Children’s Hospital Westmead, Sydney Children’s Hospital Network - Pathology.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

Pathology specimens must be transported by the NSW Health Pathology Transport Service to NSW Health Pathology’s on-site laboratory or to the appropriate laboratory providing the required diagnostic testing.

Other transport services can only be used to transport specimens to the appropriate laboratory providing the required diagnostic analysis in the following circumstances:

a) Where the NSW Health Pathology Transport Service is not operating
b) Where there is no on-site NSW Health Pathology laboratory
c) When the NSW Health Pathology laboratory is closed.

To ensure the integrity of specimens and the safety of staff and transport personnel, specimens must be appropriately handled, prepared, stored, packaged, labelled and transported in compliance with all legislative and regulatory requirements and the attached procedures. The procedures apply whether the NSW Health Pathology Transport Service, or other transport services, are used.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy applies to all personnel involved in the transport of pathology specimens including clinical, laboratory, Central Specimen Reception and transport staff.

REVISION HISTORY

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<th>Version</th>
<th>Approved by</th>
<th>Amendment notes</th>
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<td>June 2018</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary, Population and Public Health</td>
<td>New policy.</td>
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<td>(PD2018_020)</td>
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ATTACHMENTS

1. Transport of Pathology Specimens to Laboratories: Procedures.
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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 About this Document

NSW Health Pathology provides specialist pathology services for NSW Health local health districts and specialty health networks, NSW Police, private pathology providers, community based medical practitioners and private hospitals.

These procedures ensure a consistent statewide approach to the safe and timely transport of all pathology and forensic specimens in compliance with relevant regulatory requirements.

These procedures also apply to The Children’s Hospital Westmead, Sydney Children’s Hospital Network – Pathology.

The Central Specimen Reception (CSR) and transport staff at all sites are responsible for ensuring that specimens arrive in a safe, timely manner at the laboratory so as to limit deterioration in the quality of the specimen and delay in testing.

1.2 Key Definitions

**Category A Infectious Substances:** Infectious substances in a form that, when exposure to it occurs, is capable of causing permanent disability, life threatening or fatal disease in otherwise healthy humans. It is not relevant to the packing and transport of routine specimens by NSW Health Pathology staff *(IATA Guidance Document – Infectious Substances)* but is applicable in rare circumstances. Refer to the *IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations* for indicative examples.

**Category B Infectious Substances:** An infectious substance which does not meet the criteria for inclusion in Category A. This includes Category B infectious substances transported for diagnostic purposes. This applies to specimens routinely collected and transported by NSW Health Pathology staff *(IATA Guidance Document – Infectious Substances)*. Refer to the *IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations* for indicative examples.

**Central Specimen Reception (CSR):** Designated specimen reception area for each laboratory whether this is a dedicated laboratory area or a function within a wider laboratory such as a core laboratory.

**Central Specimen Reception Staff:** All staff involved in the receipt, accessioning, registration and transfer of pathology specimens.

**Chain of Custody:** A series of procedures to account for the integrity of each specimen by tracking its handling and storage from point of collection to final disposal *(AS/NZS 4308: Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs of abuse)*.

**Specimen:** Specimens that are collected directly from humans (including, but not limited to, excreta, secreta, blood and its components, tissue and tissue fluid swabs, and body parts) that are transported for purposes such as research, diagnosis, investigations, disease treatment and prevention.
Transport of Pathology Specimens to Laboratories

NSW Health Pathology Electronic Tracking System: The NSW Health Pathology Electronic Tracking System, where instituted, monitors the location of specimens in real time and ensures the fast reconciliation of deliveries by sending alerts for overdue items.

Transport staff: Transport staff includes the NSW Health Pathology Transport Service staff and the staff of other transport providers such as Local Health District (LHD) transport staff and commercial courier or freight services.

1.3 Regulatory Framework
Specimens must be appropriately handled, prepared, stored, packaged, labelled and transported to ensure the integrity and safety of specimens in accordance with:

a) National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council (NPAAC) Requirements for the Packaging and Transport of Pathology Specimens and Associated Materials (Fourth Edition 2013)

b) International Air Transport Association (IATA) Dangerous Goods Regulations (DGR) and Packing Instructions 602, 650 and 904 – these regulations apply whether the containers are sent by air, road or sea. Infectious substances fall under either category A or B as described in these procedures

c) Australian Civil Aviation Amendment Regulations 2003 (Part 92) – these regulations apply to staff packing infectious substances or dry ice.

Specimens for Viral Haemorrhagic Fever (VHF), commonly known as Ebola Virus, must be collected, packaged and transported in accordance with the NSW Health NSW Contingency Plan for Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers Guideline GL2016_002 and in the associated guidance.

2 PROCEDURE

2.1 Initial Receipt of Specimens
Specimens collected from patients for pathology and forensic testing must be sent to the Central Specimen Reception (CSR).

The CSR staff will determine whether the specimen can be analysed on-site or whether it is referred to another laboratory for diagnostic analysis.

2.2 Registering Specimens
Specimens requiring diagnostic analysis must be registered in the relevant NSW Health Pathology Laboratory Information Systems (LIS) upon receipt at a NSW Health Pathology facility.
2.3 Storing and Packaging Specimens

Storing and packaging of specimens must be in accordance with appropriate guidelines and regulations.

CSR staff must comply with all regulatory requirements (see Section 1.3).

The laboratory must have protocols and appropriate facilities for securing custody of specimens and avoiding deterioration, loss or damage during handling, preparation, storage, packaging and transport.

2.4 Transporting Specimens

Transport staff are responsible for the safe transport and delivery of specimens.

When transporting specimens to laboratories, transport staff must comply with these procedures and local protocols in relation to:

a) Dispatch (registering specimens out of the referring laboratory) and
b) Receipt (registering specimens into the receiving laboratory).

2.5 Transport Services

2.5.1 NSW Health Pathology Transport Service

The NSW Health Pathology Transport Service must transport specimens to the nearest NSW Health Pathology laboratory or to the appropriate laboratory providing the required diagnostic testing.

NSW Health Pathology is responsible for coordinating transport arrangements including other commercial courier, freight or taxi services.

2.5.2 Other Transport Services

Other transport services can only be used to transport specimens to the appropriate laboratory providing the required diagnostic analysis in the following circumstances:

a) Where the NSW Health Pathology Transport Service is not operating
b) Where there is no on-site NSW Health Pathology laboratory
c) When the NSW Health Pathology laboratory is closed.

Other transport services include:

a) Toll Delivery Services (for Category A Infectious Substances)
b) TNT Courier Services
c) Other commercial courier, freight and taxi services
d) Local health district courier services
e) Surface transport (foot or trolley) by NSW Health staff.
The following procedures in relation to dispatch, receipt and tracking of specimens apply whether the NSW Health Pathology Transport Service, or other transport services are used.

### 2.6 Dispatching Specimens

Staff dispatching specimens must register the specimens out of the referring laboratory. When dispatching specimens between CSRs, the referring staff must:

a) Allocate a consignment number to each specimen/package
b) Record the consignment number on the [CSR Delivery Dispatch Advice Form](#)
c) Notify the receiving laboratory by fax or email using the [CSR Delivery Dispatch Advice Form](#) if the Electronic Tracking System is not available
d) Monitor the timely delivery of that consignment
e) Investigate any delivery delays or failures.

Where the NSW Health Pathology Electronic Tracking System is operational, the referring CSR staff must:

a) Record the consignment number on the electronic tracking system
b) Notify the receiving laboratory via real time monitoring
c) Monitor the timely delivery of that consignment
d) Investigate any delivery delays or failures.

#### 2.6.1 Dispatching Specimens Outside the Normal Hours of Operation

The dispatching laboratory must notify the receiving laboratory in advance if the specimen is to be received outside the normal hours of operation.

### 2.7 Receiving Specimens

On receipt of the dispatch advice, the receiving CSR will monitor the timely delivery of that consignment and investigate any delivery failures.

Transport staff must register the specimen/package into the receiving laboratory.

The CSR staff must reconcile the consignment number on receipt of the specimen/package or esky.

### 2.8 Tracking Specimens

NSW Health Pathology tracks all specimens transported between NSW Health Pathology CSRs via:

a) Transfer lists when transported between CSRs with compatible LIS
b) The [CSR Delivery Dispatch Advice Form](#) when transported between CSRs where the LIS are not compatible
c) The NSW Health Pathology Electronic Tracking System, where operational.

The CSR and transport staff must comply with the local Electronic Tracking System protocols where applicable.

2.9 Escalation Process

Issues in relation to the transport of specimens such as delivery failures should be reported to the referring CSR as soon as possible.

CSR staff must seek to resolve any delivery failures and comply with local protocols for resolution and investigation.

Where required, concerns may be escalated to the local NSW Health Pathology Operations Manager.

3 TRAINING

The CSR and transport staff responsible for the packaging and transport of pathology specimens by air or surface transport must be trained, and maintain currency, in the IATA Regulations and NPAAC Requirements. Staff must have their competency assessed for the tasks that they perform.

Staff packing infectious substances or dry ice, under the Australian Civil Aviation Amendment Regulations 2003 (Part 92), and their immediate supervisors, must be accredited before performing relevant duties and must maintain accreditation.

Training records must also be maintained.

4 NON-CONFORMANCE AND AUDIT

Any non-conformances with these procedures and related policy documents must be recorded. Internal audits will be undertaken to ensure ongoing compliance.

Non-conformances must be reviewed in accordance with local procedures to identify the root cause and enable corrective action to be implemented. The progress of actions must be reviewed in accordance with the relevant quality management framework.

Investigation and trend analysis will also be undertaken to promote the elimination of root causes.

The NSW Health Pathology Clinical Governance, Quality and Risk Committee will review incidents and complaints recorded in IIMS in relation to these procedures.
5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Central Specimen Reception Staff

It is the responsibility of CSR staff to:

a) Comply with all specimen storage, packaging, tracking and transport legislative, regulatory and policy requirements including the IATA Regulations, the NPAAC Requirements, ACAA Regulations, these procedures and other relevant local protocols

b) Ensure transport services comply with all regulatory and policy requirements in relation to receiving and tracking of specimens for laboratories

c) Report any incidents in accordance with the NSW Health Incident Management Policy that do not support the safety of staff, the integrity of the specimen, and relevant regulatory storage, packaging, tracking and transport requirements

d) Be trained in the safe handling and packing of specimens in accordance with these procedures.

5.2 NSW Health Pathology Transport Staff

It is the responsibility of NSW Health Pathology transport staff to:

a) Ensure prompt, safe delivery to the laboratory or service

b) Handle the specimen in a manner that ensures the integrity of the specimen and safety of all persons with whom it may come in contact

c) Ensure all appropriate protocols for chain of custody of specimens are followed

d) Be educated in, and comply with, these procedures and local protocols in relation to the dispatch and receipt of specimens for laboratories

e) Report any incidents in accordance with the NSW Health Incident Management Policy that do not support the safety of staff, the integrity of the specimen and relevant regulatory storage, packaging, tracking and transport requirements.

5.3 NSW Health Pathology Operations Managers

It is the responsibility of NSW Health Pathology Operations Managers to manage any concerns in relation to the transport of specimens such as delivery delays or failures.

6 LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

1. Implementation Checklist
2. Transport of Specimens to Laboratories Flowchart
3. References
### 6.1 Attachment 1 – Implementation Checklist

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<tr>
<td>IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS</td>
<td>Not commenced</td>
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<td>1. Develop local protocols and provide appropriate facilities for securing specimens and avoiding deterioration, loss or damage during pre-examination activities and during handling, preparation, storage, packaging and transport (including chain of custody) in accordance with these procedures.</td>
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Notes:
6.2 Attachment 2 – Transport of Specimens to Laboratories Flowchart
6.3 Attachment 3 – References

Australian Civil Aviation Amendment Regulations 2003 (Part 92)

Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4308: Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantification of drugs of abuse

CASA (Civil Aviation Authority) Dangerous Goods webpage

Ebola Virus Disease – Information for Laboratories

International Air Transport Association (IATA) Dangerous Goods Regulations (DGR)
http://www.iata.org/publications/dgr/Pages/index.aspx

National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council (NPAAC) Requirements for the Packaging and Transport of Pathology Specimens and Associated Materials (Fourth Edition 2013)

NSW Health Guideline (GL2016 _002) NSW Contingency Plan for Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers

NSW Health Incident Management Policy

NSW Health Pathology Central Specimen Reception Delivery Dispatch Advice Form

NSW Health Pathology laboratories, addresses and contact details