

Quick Guide for Packaging and Shipping
Influenza Specimens to MDCH Bureau of Laboratories (BOL)

Important: This document does not and is not intended to constitute proper training in Dangerous Goods regulations. This document is specific for influenza testing only and should not be interpreted as being applicable to other specimens.

There are multiple ways to transport influenza specimens to MDCH BOL. When a clinical specimen for **influenza testing**, such as viral transport medium (VTM) inoculated with a patient sample, is transported it is considered a Category B infectious substance – or, in shipping terminology, a “Biological Substance, Category B.” The packaging requirements for “Biological Substance, Category B” vary slightly, depending on whether the specimen will be transported by courier, the US Postal Service, or a commercial carrier such as FedEx. But all transport methods, including courier, do have some minimum requirements according to state, federal and international shipping regulations. You and your employer can be subject to fines and penalties if these regulations are not properly followed.

At a minimum, **all transport methods require:**

1. **Leak- tight** primary specimen container (the sample tube, such as an inoculated VTM tube) properly labeled with patient identification and date of birth.
2. Material that is sufficient to **absorb all liquid** (VTM tubes contain 2 -3 ml).
3. Sealable plastic bag to contain the specimen, absorbent, and any liquid in the event of specimen leakage.
4. Some type of secure **combination packaging** (i.e., **multiple layers**) – may be simple double-bagging; or may require secondary container and rigid outer packaging.
5. **Complete paperwork** (test requisition), exactly matching information on the specimen.

1. For specimens picked up by private courier (using our VTM example above):

- Tighten the VTM cap, and wrap cap with tape or parafilm.
- Using an absorbent square or other material such as paper toweling, wrap each VTM tube separately.
- Place each individual specimen with absorbent in a separate small plastic bag¹, with zippered or twist-tie closure, followed by another suitable container, such as the double canister provided by MDCH.
 - For convenience, these individual bags or canisters may be placed into one larger bag or other container.
- Place the test requisition in a separate pouch or plastic bag, so it could be recovered in the event of a leak.
- Use frozen cold-packs to keep specimen cold. Please **do not use wet ice** ¹
- Place the wrapped and packaged specimens bag(s) into outer packaging that is “strong, tight packaging securely closed and secured against shifting...within the vehicle...” ²

Notes

¹ If all specimens are together in one bag and one of them leaks, we must reject **all** of the specimens in the bag, per CLIA regulations and BOL specimen rejection policy. We discourage use of wet ice for the same reason – if the tube is wet, we have to assume the specimen has leaked.

² This outer packaging might be provided by your courier (for example, a cooler, lidded box, etc.); but you should be aware that this is a **requirement** of DOT regulations found in 49 CFR, Ch 1, Subchapter C, Part §173.6 (Materials of Trade – Division 6.2 material, other than a Category A infectious substance).

2. For specimens sent through USPS Express Mail (using our VTM example):

Category B substances for mailing must be triple packaged: 1) Leak-proof primary container (the VTM tube); 2) leak-proof secondary container that has been tested to withstand a pressure differential of 95 kPa or greater; and 3) a rigid outer packaging. There are also additional labeling requirements for both the secondary container and the outer packaging. There must be a biohazard symbol on the secondary container, but not on the outer packaging. On the outer packaging, there must be “UN3373” and “Biological Substance, Category B” labels; and a label with the name and telephone number of a person (the “responsible party”) who is knowledgeable about the material being shipped, and who can provide emergency response information if an accident occurs.

Note: *The MDCH influenza collection kits contain all the items needed for packaging specimens and sending them via Express Mail.*

- Tighten the VTM cap, and wrap cap with tape or Parafilm.
- Use an absorbent square or wrap with paper toweling or other absorbent material.
- Place VTM and absorbent into aluminum screw-capped can and secure cap with tape.
- Place the metal cylinder in the cardboard mailing tube and secure lid.
- Make sure there is a biohazard label on one of the cylinders (the secondary container).
- Place the completed test requisition in a plastic zipper bag (to keep it dry).
- Place the cardboard tube, the frozen cold-pack, and test requisition(s) into the polystyrene mailer. **Do not use wet ice.**
- Place the polystyrene mailer in the corrugated cardboard box and secure with mailing tape.
- Apply the following to the corrugated box:
 - U.S. Express Mail Shipping Label (completed with your information),
 - U.S. Express Mail Corporate Account Stamp
 - UN 3373 Biological Substance label
 - Responsible Party name and phone number label
- http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/DCH-0800_shipping_label2_304273_7.pdf
- Call the 800 number listed on the shipping label for pickup, your local post office or take box directly to the closest U.S. Post Office.
- If there are any questions contact the Bureau of Laboratories at 517-335-8067 during normal business hours.

3. For specimens being shipped by commercial carrier, such as FedEx:

Please consult the carrier for specific requirements.

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