



November 18, 2014

Guidance on handling and packaging specimens for Ebola testing New York City (NYC)

This document applies to specimens to be tested for Ebola at the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) of the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and/or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC.) Note that the guidance for handling specimens to be tested at Wadsworth Center is different.¹

All Ebola testing requires prior approval from NYC DOHMH and CDC. This guidance applies AFTER the decision has been made (via conference with clinicians, CDC, NYS DOH, and NYC DOHMH) to test a patient for Ebola virus infection.

All packaging and shipping must be performed following U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and International Aviation Transport Association (IATA) regulations by certified staff. The NYC PHL offers packaging and shipping certification to all NYC hospitals, and, per the New York State (NYS) Commissioner of Health's Order on Ebola Virus Disease Preparedness, all "(g)eneral hospitals must...(e)nsure that staff are available on every shift, who are trained and certified in the packaging and shipping of infectious substances, for the purpose of submitting specimens for Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) testing". The order also requires that hospitals maintain a supply of appropriate packaging and shipping materials. Additionally, NYC DOHMH Public Health Laboratory staff are available 24/7 for consultation on packaging and shipping requirements.

When EVD testing has been authorized and specimens collected, PHL staff may be deployed to the hospital to ensure that specimens are packaged appropriately and all necessary paperwork is completed. PHL can provide packaging and shipping materials, labels, and other required paperwork, if needed, as a courtesy in an emergency. It is expected, however, that hospitals will supply packaging materials as required.

Supplies: (Note that this list is not intended to be exhaustive. It is a guideline only.)

Personal Protective Equipment and decontamination supplies – per hospital protocol

Packaging kits – such as Saf-T-Pak² catalog number STP-100 for Category A shipping. Packaging kits include the box and all internal packaging supplies except ice packs.

Ice packs (PHL can supply if needed)

Forms (PHL will supply if needed): PHL test request form, CDC forms (form 50-34 AND VSPB specimen submission form)

Clean work space for final steps of packaging process

Specimen collection and paperwork:

1. Duplicate specimens should be collected following NYS and CDC guidelines.³ Collect TWO lavender-top PLASTIC tubes. Use 4 mL tubes if available; if 3 mL tubes are used, fill the tube completely. Both tubes will be transported to PHL; one tube will be tested for Ebola at PHL and the second tube will be shipped from PHL to CDC for confirmatory testing, if PHL results are positive.
2. Label the specimen tubes appropriately (with at least two unique identifiers).
3. Transport specimens to the hospital laboratory following your institution's protocol. Do NOT use vacuum delivery systems; hand carry using appropriate secondary containment only.

4. Complete the PHL test request form (paper, available online, to be printed and completed <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/labs/testing-services.pdf> and CDC test request forms (two forms, form 50-34 <http://www.cdc.gov/laboratory/specimen-submission/pdf/form-50-34.pdf> and Viral Special Pathogens Branch National Surveillance Laboratory Specimen Form <http://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/pdf/specimen-submission.pdf>).

Specimen packaging (to be performed in duplicate – **one package for each of the two specimens**. Both packages will be transported to PHL by DOHMH. Specimen #1 will be tested at PHL by DOHMH staff and Specimen #2 will be shipped to CDC for confirmatory testing if the PHL test is positive.):

1. In the laboratory, following your institution’s protocol and working in a biosafety cabinet, decontaminate the specimen container/bag.
2. Ensure that the specimen is packaged and labeled correctly, decontaminated, and not leaking at this point. If possible, PHL staff will inspect the specimen. **If the specimen is in a BSL3 lab or contained lab space, this inspection should be done visually through a window if possible. For safety reasons, PHL staff will not enter BSL3 or specialized lab space at your institution.**
3. The specimen will be placed into a bag with an absorbent pad (Saf-T-Pak catalog number STP-701). This is then placed into the supplied Tyvek envelope (STP-700). The Tyvek envelope can be labelled with a list of contents (i.e.: “one blood tube – diagnostic specimen”). This is the “PRIMARY CONTAINER”.
4. Pack the primary container and ice packs into the “watertight secondary packaging”. This container can be labelled with a list of contents (i.e.: “one blood tube – diagnostic specimen”). This is the “SECONDARY CONTAINER”.
5. Decontaminate the outside of the secondary container and remove from contaminated area.
6. Place the secondary container into the “rigid outer packaging” (the shipping box). The test request form should be placed in the envelope provided by PHL (or a regular envelope) and placed on top of the secondary container, inside the shipping box. **Note which box contains the PHL paperwork and which contains the CDC paperwork.**
7. Attach completed chain of custody paperwork to the outside of the box.

NYC PHL INFORMATION:

455 First Ave.
New York, NY 10016
To be delivered to Intake entrance on
26th Street side of building
Health Police phone number: 212-213-2550

PHL contact numbers:

Business hours: 212-447-2578
Non-business hours: Poison Control Center, ask
for PHL Duty Officer on call: 212-764-7667

CDC SHIPPING ADDRESS:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
ATTN STAT LAB: VSPB, Unit #70
1600 Clifton Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30333
Phone: 404-639-1115

¹See “Collection and Transport of Specimens to Wadsworth Center for Ebola Testing”

²Provided as an example for informational purposes only. NYC DOHMH does not endorse any specific product or supplier.

³See “Revised NYS/NYC Laboratory Guidelines for Handling Specimens from Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Ebola Virus Disease”