

Guidance on sending diagnostic samples

Over the past few months some practices have experienced problems when trying to send routine diagnostic samples to us using Royal Mail. Royal Mail diagnostic testing as long as the packages not accept 'Category A' infectious material contain dangerous human or animal veterinary samples. It is important to practice to ensure that samples are sent in accordance with the relevant legislation.



should accept all samples for routine comply with the relevant legislation. They do but as this only applies to samples known to pathogens this should not affect routine emphasise that it is the responsibility of the

The general guideline from the HSE is that samples (blood, tissue, excreta, secreta etc.) from humans or animals are considered to be Category B infectious substances. These samples are then assigned to UN3373 and must be packaged according to IATA PI:650 for transport. Royal Mail will transport Category B infectious material if it is packaged correctly. There is an added complication that for Category B samples each individual package must hold a total of less than 50ml of liquid or 50g of tissue.

Samples which are taken for serology testing from a healthy animal are exempt from UN3373. This states that "patient specimens for which there is minimal likelihood that pathogens are present are not subject to the Regulations if the specimen is packed in a packaging which will prevent any leakage and which is marked with the words "Exempt human specimen" or "Exempt animal specimen" as appropriate."

Whether samples are being sent as 'category B' or as an 'Exempt animal specimen' the packaging must meet as a minimum the following conditions:

Packaging must consist of 3 components, leak proof primary receptacle (blood tube/universal container) and secondary packaging (sealed plastic bag), and an outer packaging of adequate strength for its capacity, mass and intended use (cardboard box). There must also be sufficient absorbent material included in the package to absorb all the sample volume (blue roll, foam, cotton wool etc.).

Samples being sent under UN3373 Category B Infectious Material should also display the appropriate symbol. This is a diamond with each side at least 50mm in size in a colour which contrasts clearly with the package background. The diamond should contain 'UN3373' in letters at least 6mm high.

In order to avoid any difficulties the outer packaging should be clearly marked with either:

'UN3373 Category B Infectious Material'

Or

'Exempt animal specimen - non-hazardous'

A degree of professional judgement is required in order to determine whether samples are non-hazardous or Category B infectious materials. It would seem reasonable that in the majority of situations where there would be a need to send over 50ml of blood the exempt animal specimen ruling could apply, for example herd screening for Johne's, screening 20 animals for a metabolic profile. It is however up to the practitioner to use their judgement before deciding how to ship samples.

Reasonably priced medical courier companies also exist that will deliver samples overnight nationwide that would be suitable for a practice that regularly posts samples. Biobest can provide practices with detailed advice on sending all sample types to us.

- We supply reply paid labels, and small reply paid rigid cardboard boxes suitable for sending up to 10 samples on request. Supply of labels and small boxes is free of charge subject to fair use by the practice.
- Large reply paid boxes are available for sending 50 up to 50 blood or milk tubes (Exempt Animal Specimens) at £15 per box, full details on our webshop or by phoning our office
- Companion animal test prices include reply paid postage.
- For farm animal samples there is a charge of £2 where a reply paid label or box is used to return samples to Biobest. Where a practice includes companion animal work in the same package all charges are waived.