

Transporting infectious substances in the veterinary setting

Trainer's overview

To have your employees get the most out of their training sessions, it is suggested that:

- The training sessions should be conducted in a relatively quiet uninterrupted environment.
- The sessions should be held the same time and day of the month (e.g., first Tuesday at 12:30).
- Employee handouts should be given out along with pencils/pens.
- Review the trainers guide, employee handout and any references.
- Keep the sessions to a maximum of 20 minutes.
- Give personal examples of incidents or prevention techniques that worked for you.
- Ensure that all employees present sign the Safety Training Sign-in Sheet for documentation purposes.
- If some employees were not present, a second training session should be given.



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Trainer's guide

At issue: Patient specimens

A patient specimen is any human or animal material, including excreta, secretions, blood and its components, tissue, and tissue swabs, body parts, and specimens in transport media (e.g., transwabs, culture media, and blood culture bottles) being transported for diagnostic or investigational purposes, or disease treatment or prevention but excluding live infected animals.

Incorrect packaging of potentially infectious substances can quickly land a veterinary practice into regulatory non-compliance while also adding a health risk to employees and other animals.

A best practice is that laboratory specimens are properly packaged to prevent leakage or breaks in the containers and pose no health hazard or sanitation problem.

This is true because once specimens are packaged correctly, neither the package handlers nor the environment will be exposed to the specimen.

Additionally, veterinarians are to review their methods of preparing diagnostic specimens and ensure that they are in compliance with all applicable guidelines and federal and state laws, including required training.

Veterinary practices send specimens to diagnostic labs on a daily basis, so it is vital to ensure that the staff (including veterinarians) who package the items have had the required documented training and that each shipment meets current packaging standards.

Any items found to fall below these standards may result in the shipper being visited by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) or the U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Fines associated with noncompliance of packaging or training can be substantial.

What you need to know:

The classification of the sample being shipped determines the packaging and training requirements which are applicable.



Category A: An infectious substance in a form capable of causing permanent disability or life-threatening/fatal disease in otherwise healthy humans or animals when exposure to it occurs.

General packaging: Watertight primary container for the specimen, absorbent material, watertight secondary container with list of contents on the outside, United Nations rated rigid outer container with proper UN labeling. The proper shipping name and identification number is: "UN2900, Infectious substances, affecting animals".



Training requirements: Specific formal training and documentation of it is required for all staff (including veterinarians) who package or transport items in this category.

Category B: An infectious substance that is not in a form generally capable of causing permanent disability or life-threatening/fatal disease in otherwise healthy humans or animals when exposure to it occurs.

Examples of Category B infectious substances are samples that are suspicious for organisms such as leptospirosis or suspected but not confirmed cases of Category A infectious substances.

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General packaging: Leak proof primary container with the specimen, absorbent material, and leak proof secondary packaging, such as a sealed plastic bag, and rigid outer package with proper markings. Cushioning material should be added as needed. It is no longer appropriate to use the term “Diagnostic specimen” or “Clinical specimen” to label the package.

The proper shipping name and identification number is: “UN3373, Biological Substances, Category B”.

Training requirements: Documented training is required for all staff (including veterinarians) who package or transport items in this category. Veterinarians and staff who ship waste cultures or stock of a Category B [infectious substance](#) must be [hazmat trained](#).



Otherwise, those who ship Category B infectious substances such as samples for routine testing must be trained on the information and compliant packaging techniques presented in 49 CFR* 173.199. Even though the training may be informal and in-house, it must be documented.

Note: Plates or cultures of bacterial or viral organisms are NOT included in the definition of “patient specimen” and may only be shipped under much more stringent requirements and regulations.

Note: Specimens from suspected cases of **foreign animal diseases** (FADs), reportable diseases, and other very highly infectious and virulent diseases do not fall within these guidelines. Contact your State Veterinarian or the Federal Veterinarian-in-charge if a FAD is suspected.

References

- [DOT Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration](#)
- [ABCs of Veterinary Clinic Waste](#)
- [CDC Zoonotic Diseases of Public Health Concern](#)
- [Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal](#)
- [University of Illinois-Biological Safety Cabinets](#)

Safety tips

- “No train – no touch.”
- Practice good hygiene - wash your hands often.
- Gloves must be worn for all procedures that may involve direct skin contact.
- Face and eye protection must be worn when there is potential for splash or impacting objects.
- Eating, drinking, smoking, storing food or utensils, and applying cosmetics are not permitted in any laboratory work area. Contact lenses are not permitted in any laboratory work area.
- Long hair must be tied back or restrained.
- If you don’t feel comfortable, let the supervisor know and when in doubt, get assistance.

*Code of Federal Regulations

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Questions for Discussion

Question: What are the container categories for infectious substances?

Answer: A and B

Question: In the veterinary setting which category of container are you most likely to encounter?

Answer: B

Question: Why is it important to use the proper container for a potentially infectious material?

Answer: There is a possibility of illness and disease if these materials are not properly handled

Question: What is another reason for using the proper material container?

Answer: The clinic could be fined for improper infectious materials packaging.

Questions?

Please complete the sign-in sheet.



