

Microbiology Specimen collection, storage and transport requirements for Primary Care Users

Please be aware of the following:

- Specimens should be transported to the Microbiology laboratory as soon as possible. Please ensure the specimen label and request form has the **correct date and time of sample collection**.
- The time from collection to transport listed below will optimize results; longer times may compromise results.
- If transport or processing is delayed, refrigeration is preferable to storage at ambient temperature. Specimens should be stored in a temperature- monitored fridge 2-8°C.
- Generally speaking, specimens >3 days old will be rejected unless the specimen is deemed to be unrepeatable.

Specimen Type	Ideal Time (hours)	Acceptable time (hours) and storage requirements (if delay)	Comments
Urine	Ideally < 4 Hours, within 24 hours	Max. 48 Hours if stored 2-8°C	Boric acid containers must be filled to the line- <i>less than 10ml may inhibit the growth of some bacteria.</i>
Faeces	Ideally < 12 Hours, within 24 hours	Max. 48 Hours if stored 2-8°C	Specimens should be transported as quickly as possible- important pathogens such as <i>Shigella species</i> may not survive the pH changes that occur in faecal specimens if not promptly delivered to the laboratory, even if refrigerated.
Swabs- Wound, Skin, ENT, Genital,	Ideally < 12 Hours, within 24 hours	Max. 48 Hours if stored 2-8°C	If fastidious bacteria such as <i>N.gonorrhoea</i> is suspected transport swabs to laboratory as quickly as possible to guarantee viability of organisms (< 24 hours).
Sputum	Ideally < 12 Hours	Max. 24 Hours if stored 2-8°C	Specimens should be transported as quickly as possible to give the best opportunity to culture pathogenic organisms and reduce the risk of overgrowth with contaminants.
Samples for Mycology	12- 48 hours	Delays – room temperature (keep specimen dry)	
Blood Samples for serology	< 72 hours	Delays- store at 2 - 8°C	
Viral Swabs	24 hours	< 72 hours Once collected, specimens can be stored at ambient or refrigerated temperatures	
Chlamydia/Gonorrhoea PCR- Swabs and Urines	Urine samples not in transport media- 24 hours. Swabs, and urine in PCR media < 48 hours	< 72 hours Once collected, specimens can be stored at ambient or refrigerated temperatures	
Fluids, Aspirates and Pus	Ideally < 4 hours	24 Hours if stored 2-8°C	

For further information or queries, please see the [MTW Pathology Website](#), or alternatively contact the Microbiology laboratory on 01622 224040