

Guidance for laboratories shipping specimens to WHO reference laboratories that provide confirmatory testing for COVID-19 virus.

Interim guidance
2 March 2020



**World Health
Organization**

To expedite the shipment of clinical samples from patients with suspected COVID-19 virus infection from the country of collection to one of the WHO reference laboratories providing confirmatory testing for COVID-19, a shipment mechanism has been established. To use this shipment mechanism, please follow the instructions below carefully¹.

This mechanism, which is similar to the GISRS SFP², uses contracted couriers (World Courier and in some circumstances HAZGO) to ship the specimens from the sending laboratory to the WHO reference laboratories providing confirmatory testing for COVID-19.

PROCEDURE AND DOCUMENTATION FOR SHIPMENT

1. For each shipment, laboratories are requested to complete the attached Booking Form, forward by email to World Courier, Switzerland (opsgva@worldcourier.ch) and copy all WHO staff listed on the Booking Form. In countries where World Courier is not operating, HAZGO will be contacted by the HQ WHO staff listed on the booking form. HAZGO will be instructed to carry out the transport using the same request and funding mechanism.

2. The designated courier (World Courier, or HAZGO), or a local agent representative, will then contact the shipping laboratory to arrange collection at the earliest convenience including any other instruction related to the shipment. The agent will provide all relevant packaging, labelling and paperwork required to comply with international transport regulations. Dry ice will also be provided should the laboratory request "Frozen" shipment on the Booking Form. For advice on shipment temperatures see table in annex 1. Clinical (non-propagated) samples from suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases are assigned to UN 3373, Biological substance, Category B, unless the countries of origin/transit/destination have issued national recommendations defining otherwise.

3. The shipping laboratory will be required to complete the following paperwork before the agent can accept the package for shipment:

- a) The filled in booking form,
- b) A packing list/invoice indicating the recipient's address, number of packages, detail of contents including weight and value. NB: for international transport, a minimal value is required even if the items are being provided free of charge. The World Courier or HAZGO courier will be able to advise the laboratory on any of the above administrative requirements,
- c) An export permit for the originating country as relevant,
- d) An import permit for the recipient country as relevant,
- e) Any other document requested by national regulations for importing infectious substances,
- f) A House Airway Bill (HWB). This document will be provided by the courier agent,

¹ *Costs of shipments will only be covered by WHO when done strictly in accordance with the above instructions, including the use only of WHO-designated couriers. WHO is not able to accept or reimburse costs or invoices from laboratories not following up the above described process.*

² https://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/logistic_activities/en/

NB. The courier's local shipping agent will be able to provide assistance concerning export documentation upon request.

4. Include your WHO regional laboratory focal point in the email request that you send out. If not known, please contact the logistics emergency support team (Mr José Rovira, email roviraj@who.int and Mr Christian Fuster, email fuster@who.int) with WHO/Shipments/COVID-19 and the country name in the subject line.

REFERENCES

- 1) Laboratory testing for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in suspected human cases. Interim guidance. World Health Organization; 2 March 2020.
- 2) Protocol to investigate non-seasonal influenza and other emerging acute respiratory diseases. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. (https://www.who.int/influenza/resources/publications/outbreak_investigation_protocol/en/).
- 3) Druce et al. JCM. 2011. Evaluation of Swabs, Transport Media, and Specimen Transport Conditions for Optimal Detection of Viruses by PCR.
- 4) Collecting, preserving and shipping specimens for the diagnosis of avian influenza A(H5N1) virus infection. World Health Organization; 2006.

ANNEX 1.

Recommended conditions for international shipment of specimens referred for COVID-19 testing ^(1,2,3,4)				
Specimen type (test)	Storage until shipment	Expected shipment time	Recommended shipment temperature *	Shipment category **
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab (+ VTM #) • Serum • Whole blood • Urine • Stools 	2-8 °C	≤ 5 days	2-8 °C	Biological substance, Category B – UN 3373.
		> 5 days	-70 °C (dry ice)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronchoalveolar lavage (+VTM #) • (Endo)tracheal aspirate (+VTM #) • Nasopharyngeal aspirate or nasal wash (+VTM #) • Sputum 	2-8 °C	≤ 2 days	2-8 °C	
		> 2 days	-70 °C (dry ice)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tissue from biopsy or autopsy including from lung (+ VTM or saline) 	2-8 °C	≤ 24 hours	2-8 °C	
		> 24 hours	-70 °C (dry ice)	

* Avoid repeated freezing and thawing, if sample is already frozen send it out on dry ice.

** Unless the countries of origin/transit/destination have issued national recommendations defining otherwise.

Use viral transport medium (VTM) when available. If VTM is not available sterile saline may be used in place of VTM (in such case, duration of sample storage at 2-8 °C may be different from what is indicated above).

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