

Alabama Department of Public Health
Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL)

Instructions Regarding Specimens To Be Tested

General Instructions

1. You must notify the State Epidemiology Division on all outbreaks regardless of source.
2. Before collecting outbreak specimens, call the State Epidemiology Division, Surveillance Branch at 1-800-338-8374. If a specimen is not related to an outbreak, please call BCL at 334-260-3400.
3. Be specific about tests requested, consult State Epidemiology. The lab's role is to test and assist with interpretation of test results.
4. Please complete all information on the lab form.
5. Clinical specimens should be at the lab within 24 hours of collection whenever possible and preferably within 2 hours.
6. Fifty (50) grams of food -should be collected in sterile plastic containers and/or Whirl-pak™ bags under sterile conditions. Submit food samples within 36 hours of collection; please see BCL Foodborne Illness Investigation, Sample Collection and Submission Criteria. A minimum of 50 grams is required for each organism tested. If a hospital or another lab isolates a pathogen that is suspected to be associated with an outbreak, they must be instructed to send the isolate to the BCL.
7. Do not hold specimens. Be sure clinical specimens are preserved as necessary according to the criteria and ship immediately to the lab. Food samples should be shipped separately from clinical specimens. The clinical specimens will be tested first for the suspect agent.
8. If Norovirus is suspected in an outbreak, it is important to collect specimens as soon as possible.
9. Food samples must be submitted by a qualified environmentalist through the county health departments.
10. Foods actually ingested, foods from the same preparation, or unopened containers of the same lot number must be submitted.
11. Food samples reported unacceptable will be held for 2 weeks before discarding.

Note: All instructions and information serve as guides. All outbreak information must be reviewed to determine who is tested, what agent to test for and how to submit the specimens.