

BIOTERRORISM RESPONSE CLINICAL SPECIMEN SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINERS AND CORONERS

County Medical Examiners are essential partners in Bioterrorism preparedness. They play an important role in the response to a known biological attack as well as in the surveillance for a covert attack because of their state statutory authority to investigate deaths that are sudden, suspicious, violent, unattended, and unexplained. The same principle applies to the investigation and surveillance of an event of biological warfare or biological terrorism. Clinical specimens from suspected bioterrorism-related cases should be submitted to the Office of Laboratory Services (OLS) through the Laboratory Response Network channel, in which the specimen is initially submitted to a Sentinel Level Laboratory for preliminary identification, or, if deemed necessary, the clinical specimen can be submitted directly to the OLS.

Certain hospital and other clinical laboratories in West Virginia performing microbiological testing are recognized as the Sentinel Level Laboratories for the CDC Laboratory Response Network for the state. These laboratories perform only minimal identification, e.g., “rule-out” testing. The Office of Laboratory Services Threat Preparedness & Bioterrorism Response Section is recognized as the only Reference Level Laboratory for confirmatory identification of *Bacillus anthracis*, *Yersinia pestis*, *Francisella tularensis*, *Brucella* spp., and other agents of Bioterrorism.

If you have any questions about isolating, identifying or submitting an organism that may be an agent of Bioterrorism, call the OLS Threat-Preparedness & Bioterrorism Response Section at 304-558-3530 extension 2301 during regular work hours 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

If you have other general questions pertaining to Bioterrorism, we recommend calling your Local Health Department for more information.

If you need further information on patient symptoms or management, call the Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology of the WV Bureau for Public Health at 304-558-5358 or 800-423-1271 (in WV only).

CHAIN OF CUSTODY

Chain of custody is considered appropriate for non-human specimens or items that are followed and examined for evidentiary purposes. Chain of custody applies to clinical specimens from forensic death investigations submitted to OLS for Bioterrorism agent identification. Medical Examiner facilities should, therefore, still maintain a suspicious isolate or specimen for further forensic investigation after a specimen is determined negative for the presence of a Bioterrorism agent. Clinical specimens submitted to OLS from hospitals meet this requirement through normal hospital practices.

SENTINEL LEVEL TESTING – PRELIMINARY IDENTIFICATION

County Medical Examiners should not attempt to perform any identification on specimens which are suspected to contain an agent of Bioterrorism. “Rule-out” testing for potential Bioterrorism agents using Sentinel Level protocols should be performed by Sentinel Level Laboratories only. Before submitting a specimen to a Sentinel Level Laboratory, (i.e. the hospital laboratory) for preliminary identification, please notify the Laboratory Director and the Infection Control Officer in advance that the specimen may contain a Bioterrorism agent. For further information on Sentinel Level laboratories and their testing protocols, please visit the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) Sentinel Level Clinical Laboratory Guidelines website at: <https://www.asm.org/index.php/guidelines/sentinel-guidelines> or the CDC Emergency Preparedness & Response website at: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/>.

For detailed descriptions of safety procedures, microbiological practices, and packaging and shipping information, please refer to the Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories, United States Department of Health and Human Services, 5th edition, edited by J.Y. Richmond and R.W. McKinney, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999. The BMBL is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/biosafety/publications/bmb15/>.

If you have a suspected agent of Bioterrorism and need to submit a clinical specimen directly to the Office of Laboratory Services Threat-Preparedness & Bioterrorism Response Section for confirmatory testing, please follow the procedure guidelines provided on these information sheets. These guidelines are subject to change in order to improve the LRN system. Any changes or updates will be forwarded to recognized Sentinel Laboratories and County Medical Examiners upon approval.

REFERENCE LEVEL TESTING – CONFIRMATORY IDENTIFICATION

Before submitting a specimen directly to the OLS, please notify the state Office of Chief Medical Examiner. To submit a clinical specimen that is suspected for the presence of a potential Bioterrorism agent, you must first contact the Office of Laboratory Services Threat Preparedness & Bioterrorism Response Section and the Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE) of the WV Bureau for Public Health for approval of specimen. Please also notify your Local Health Department's designated Threat Preparedness contact.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Office of Laboratory Services - Threat Preparedness & Bioterrorism Response Section
304-558-3530 extension 2301 (8:00 AM - 4:30 PM)

West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
304-558-5380 (24/7)

Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE)
304-558-5358 (24/7)

West Virginia Bureau for Public Health
(304) 540-5719 (Bureau for Public Health Emergency Pager after hours and holidays)

REQUIRED FORMS

Please submit a "Suspected Bioterrorism Agent Clinical Specimen Submission Form" with each clinical specimen. Form is available on our website at: dhr.wv.gov/ols.

PACKAGING AND TRANSPORT

Shipment of clinical specimens must comply with current federal and/or International Air Transport Association (IATA) packaging and shipping guidelines. Only personnel specially trained and certified in packaging and shipping are to package and ship clinical specimens to the OLS Reference Level Laboratory.

Please follow the packaging requirements in accordance with the IATA dangerous goods regulations for transport of biological agents of human disease or materials that are known or suspected of containing them (infectious substances), which consists of triple packaging of the specimen (primary receptacle, water tight secondary packaging, and durable outer packaging). The packaging materials used must be certified to meet rigorous performance tests as outlined in the DOT, USPS, PHS, and IATA regulations. Check the "WV Shipping of Infectious Substances by Air Transportation (IATA) Checklist" for a quick reference of the guidelines. You must include "ATTN: Threat-Preparedness & Bioterrorism Response Section" in the address on the outside of the package. Please submit each specimen using FedEx Priority Overnight shipping. To obtain the rules and regulations for shipping infectious substances via FedEx, please see the FedEx Dangerous Goods Service Information website at: <http://www.fedex.com/us/hazardous-materials/>.