



Referring Samples

Sampling Techniques and Equipment

Laboratory results are only as good as the samples submitted allow them to be. It is important that samples are taken by the correct techniques, with suitable equipment, placed into suitable containers and media/preservatives and securely despatched to the laboratory in the shortest possible time.

If you require advice or assistance with specific sampling or collection techniques, please contact us for telephone advice, our recommended protocol and/or literature reference.

Labelling and Request Forms

Please label all specimens legibly, with the name of the horse and site of collection, if appropriate. This is particularly important where official certification is required (e.g. C.E.M. bacteriology). Incorrect, illegible or miss-spelt names may lead to requests for corrected certification. We treat all information and results in a strictly confidential manner. Please complete one of our request forms when submitting a sample, including a concise case history, in order that we may try to give you as much help as possible.

Dispatch

It is advisable to avoid sending samples over the weekend where they may be held up and often deteriorate in the post. Where possible, it is sensible to centrifuge or to allow clotted samples to stand until it is possible to pour off the serum, in order to avoid haemolysis. Please do not refrigerate EDTA samples or haemolysis will render the results useless. Please do not send frozen or unfixed tissues for histological examinations as they will arrive in an unsuitable condition for examination.

With urgent samples, or foals and foeti for post-mortem examinations, we strongly recommend personal delivery (e.g. by owner) or private courier service.

Post and Packing

It is important to ensure proper packaging of specimens (e.g. to UN 3373 standard) so that disappointments do not occur. We will supply pre-printed labels on request. Sound packaging is essential to avoid the breakage of containers in the post and the loss of, or damage to samples. Internal and external packing is essential ('Jiffy bags' alone cannot be relied upon). The leakage of pathological specimens can present public health hazards and the Royal Mail may refuse to handle soiled packages.

See the 'RCVS Postage & Packing Notice' on page 2.

Large Batches of Samples

We are pleased to receive large batches of clinical or research samples, and offer special batch prices (see our current price list). Many of our clients use routine periodic haematological and biochemical assessments for stables of race and other performance horses and take advantage of our batch pricing offers. For large numbers of samples we appreciate some early warning, even if this is given while the samples are in transit.



RCVS Postage & Packing Notice

The following notice was published and circulated by the R.C.V.S. in August 1988:

1. In general, the despatch of deleterious substances by post is banned by the Post Office. There are however special exemptions for pathological material sent to and from laboratories by veterinary surgeons and some others. Very highly infected material such as that containing foot and mouth disease virus or some especially dangerous human pathogens are excluded from this exemption.
2. Members of the public may send specimens through the post only at the express request of a registered laboratory or veterinary surgeon.
3. Only first-class letter post may be used. Parcel post must not be used.
4. The Post Office requires that all samples be packed in a particular way. These rules must be followed otherwise the Post Office may remove and destroy the specimen.
 - a. Every specimen must be enclosed in a primary container which is securely sealed. This container must not exceed 50 ml (although special multi-specimen packs may be approved).
 - b. The primary container must be wrapped in sufficient absorbent material to absorb all possible leakage in the event of damage.
 - c. The container and absorbent material must be sealed in a leak proof plastic bag.
 - d. This package must then be placed in either:
 - i. A polypropylene clip down container.
 - ii. A cylindrical light metal container.
 - iii. A strong cardboard box with full depth lid.
 - iv. A specially grooved two piece polystyrene box.
5. It is recommended that this completed package should then be placed in a padded bag.
6. Multi-specimen packs may be used provided that each primary container is separated from the next by absorbent packing.
7. Any other packaging systems must have the prior approval of the Post Office.
8. Labelling: The outer cover must be labelled "Pathological Specimen Fragile. With Care". It must show the name and address of the sender to be contacted in case of leakage.
9. Therapeutic and diagnostic substances, such as blood, serum, vaccines etc. are classified as pathological specimens.

Please ensure that anything you send by post complies with the regulations otherwise it may be removed from the mail and destroyed, and you will lose a valuable specimen. You may also be prosecuted by the Post Office. Even more importantly, you may cause injury or disease to someone handling the package either during its transit through the mails, or at the receiving laboratory.

RCVS August 1988