

The Stool Sample Kit: Instructions for Staff

What is the Stool Sample Kit?

The stool sample kit is a packet of materials for would-be cases who have agreed to give you a stool specimen for pathogen testing.

Although many people can be talked into donating a stool specimen, we don't always get good specimens back from everyone who says yes. Sometimes they don't come back, and sometimes they aren't good. After much thought, discussion, and experimentation, we've come up with this kit—a revolutionary new packet of materials (in English and Spanish) that makes collecting a stool specimen simple and fun. You distribute the kits, collect them when they've been used, process the specimens back at the health department, and send the specimens to the OSPHL by courier.

Stocking the Stool Sample Kit

Kits can be ordered directly from the OSPHL on the Stockroom Order Request Form (#71-54). Most counties should try to keep ~5 kits on hand—maybe a few more in the biggest counties.

The kit can be stored fully assembled, or—if storage space is at a premium—you can stack the paper bowls and the specimen containers separately. Without those items, the It-Kit (contents shown in the photo) lies reasonably flat in its large manila envelope—but don't forget to add them back before you send the kits out!

In addition to the Stool Sample Kits, which are for patients, you'll need the materials to use for processing the specimens that will start flooding in. Keep some Cary-Blair transport media on hand for bacterial cultures. Formalin preservative is recommended for most parasite testing, but if you don't have this on hand you can order as needed (which won't be very often). You'll need sterile swabs to inoculate some of the raw stool into the Cary-Blair or parasite specimen containers, some absorbent pads that you can work on to facilitate clean-up, and the official OSPHL specimen submission forms with the bar code stickers.



The kit is shelf-stable indefinitely, although the alcohol pads may dry out a bit after years. Cary-Blair media can be stored at room temperature and have a pretty long shelf life, but they do outdate—check the expiration date before using.

Distributing Stool Sample Kits to Sick People

How you distribute kits to potential donors depends on the circumstances. You may drop off a stack at a school, office, or camp; or they may be handed to restaurant staff. You can take them to someone's home, or you may ask people to pick them up at the health department. "Empty" kits can be mailed, and in many areas will be delivered the next day. The postage (\$2.29 in May 2012) may look like a bargain next to the gas and staff time needed to drop it off. (*N.B. Used kits cannot be returned in the mail!*)

You must tell donors how to get the specimens back to you. Again, this will depend on the situation. You may be picking them up from their home, school, or work site; or you may have asked them to drop them off at the health department. Whatever route you choose, write in your instructions in the box at

the bottom right of the instruction sheet. Include your contact information (at least a name, phone number, and email address). You can write your instructions in by hand, print labels to stick on, or just print the instructions in the right location on an otherwise blank piece of paper, and then photocopy that onto the pre-printed form.

Processing Specimens

All specimens must be processed before they can be sent to the OSPHL.

Experience suggests that we cannot rely on the donors to consistently get everything right, so we must do it for them. Processing involves checking the information for completeness, filling out the proper lab submission form, aliquoting some of the specimen into Cary-Blairs or formalin if indicated, making sure that all the containers have both the patient's name and a bar code sticker, and making sure that nothing is going to leak.

If all goes according to plan, the patient will have given you a container containing a raw stool specimen in a biohazard bag together with a slip of paper with all relevant data (name, DOB, collection date and time, etc.). If some of the key data is missing, you'll need to call them back.

Plain raw stool is best for viral testing, but most specimens should also be subdivided into Cary-Blair transport media. This will greatly enhance the the possibility of bacterial recovery should the viral tests be negative. Most of the time it will be viral and the Cary-Blairs won't be run, but you never know—this may be the only way that we discover an entirely new pathogen! If you don't set up a Cary-Blair, the lab will not run any bacterial tests. Just stick a swab into the stool and transfer a small amount to the Cary-Blair; you can break off the swab in the container. Wear gloves and a mask and work in an area that can be sanitized when you are done; keep in mind that this stuff is potentially infectious!

All specimens should be promptly refrigerated and kept cool, but not frozen.

The lab cannot run specimens that aren't properly labeled, so you'll need to check that all containers are sealed tightly and labeled with 1) the patient's name and 2) the bar code sticker. Transcribe the information from the patient's slip onto the official OSPHL specimen submission form. Indicate which tests you want (e.g., norovirus) and the outbreak number (e.g., 2012-2589) if there is one. You can use just the Virology/Immunology form if it looks noro-like; the lab will run the Cary-Blair for bacteria without an additional General Microbiology form. Talk to the ACDP epidemiologist or the lab if there is any ambiguity about what to do.

Getting Specimens to the Lab

Enclose the specimen(s) in the biohazard bag; be sure to include the absorbent white paper. (That little piece of "paper" can sop up a surprisingly large amount of liquid.) Put the official lab request form in to the outer pocket of the biohazard bag; you can hang onto the original slips from the cases and shred them when you're finished with the outbreak. Prepare your Transport Manifest and Container as you normally would (refer to the OSPHL courier handbook for further details).

Normally you will send the specimens in your regular courier shipment, but if there will be a significant delay or there are other special circumstances, you may need to request an urgent pick up. For more information about courier options, contact Sarah Humphrey (503.693.4124; sarah.m.humphrey@state.or.us).