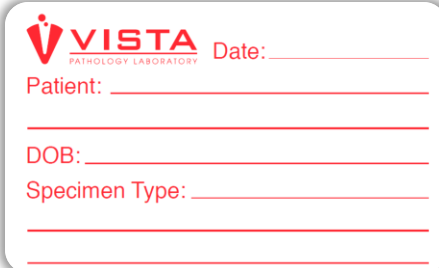


## How to Submit a Surgical Specimen

Correctly submitting a specimen for surgical or cytological analysis is one of the most important things a clinic can do to help ensure patient safety and accurate test results. A mislabeled specimen or incomplete requisition can delay a diagnosis, creating anxiety for the patient at a time when prompt results are most needed. Please follow these directions in order to ensure timely results:

### I. *Submitting a Surgical (Tissue) Specimen*

**Specimen Container Labeling:** Regulatory agencies require that all containers be labeled with two unique patient identifiers, typically the patient's name and date of birth. It is imperative that the container itself, *and not the lid*, be labeled, as lids can be easily switched. The container label must also include the specimen source, with specific site information such as "left" or "right", and date of collection. If more than one specimen on a given patient is submitted, number the specimen containers as #1, #2, #3, etc., in addition to the above information. An example of available labels is shown below:



VISTA  
PATHOLOGY LABORATORY

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Patient: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Specimen Type: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Specimens submitted in formalin:** Most routine biopsies and other surgically-removed specimens are submitted in the tissue fixative, formalin, a formaldehyde-based solution. Formalin preserves the tissue and prevents deterioration. For optimal preservation, specimens must be placed into formalin as soon as possible after excision from the patient. For adequate tissue fixation, please ensure that the specimen floats freely within formalin in the container. If in doubt, use a larger container, especially when handling large specimens such as from a mastectomy or colectomy. Never force a large specimen into a small container, as the tissue will deteriorate and may not be suitable for microscopic examination. If a container of sufficient size is not available, please call Vista Pathology for additional options. Secure the lid to prevent formalin leakage. **Formalin is toxic and should be handled with care.**
- **Specimens submitted out of formalin:** Some tissues must be submitted unfixed ("fresh"), or in an alternative fixative or preservative. These include specimens for frozen section, muscle and nerve biopsies, or a specimen for immunofluorescence. If

you are unsure as to whether or not the specimen can be placed into formalin, please call us to discuss. Once in formalin, the tissue fixation process cannot be reversed.

- **Frozen Section:** A frozen section provides a rapid, intraoperative diagnosis, with a turnaround time typically of 20 minutes or less from the time of receipt in our laboratory. It is useful when surgical margins require intraoperative assessment or in other situations that would affect the subsequent course of the surgery or procedure. Please call Vista Pathology at (541) 770-4559 if you have a procedure that may require a frozen section. Once the procedure is scheduled, please call Vista Pathology prior to specimen collection to schedule a STAT courier pick-up. Once collected, **DO NOT PLACE THE SPECIMEN INTO FORMALIN.** Instead, place the fresh tissue on the smooth side of a lightly moistened Telfa to prevent the tissue from drying out, and then place the Telfa into the specimen container. Refer to appropriate specimen labeling above.
- **Muscle or Nerve Biopsy:** Due to the delicate nature of this tissue and special handling requirements, please call Vista Pathology at (541) 770-4559 to schedule a muscle or nerve biopsy. Once the procedure is scheduled, please call Vista Pathology at the time of collection for a STAT pick-up. For proper processing, the specimen must be received by Vista Pathology Laboratory before noon on the day of specimen collection. The specimen should be wrapped in a gauze sponge that is lightly moistened in saline. The specimen and gauze then should be placed in a sealed container, and the container placed on wet ice in a zip-lock bag. Refer to appropriate specimen labeling above.
- **Specimens for Immunofluorescence:** Providers requesting immunofluorescence testing on tissue are advised to call ahead, before scheduling the procedure, and speak with one of our pathologists to discuss the appropriate test. Once the testing procedure has been established, place the tissue in Michel's transport medium. Michel's is necessary to preserve immuno-antigenicity of the tissue so that the fluorescent stains can be visualized. Michel's transport medium is supplied by our laboratory. Please call (541) 770-4559 to place an order. The specimen must be received by noon on the day of collection.

**Microbiologic Culture:** Vista Pathology does not perform clinical laboratory testing, including specimen cultures. *These must be submitted to a hospital lab or other clinical laboratory.* If cultures are needed on a surgical pathology specimen, we recommend that these be submitted from the site at the time of the procedure, as this lessens the risk of contamination. If you have questions about a specimen that may require a culture, please contact one of our pathologists at (541) 770-4559.