

<b>DATE:</b>	25 November 2025
<b>TO:</b>	Healthcare Providers and/or Medical Clinics Sending Formalin Fixed Specimens to APL
<b>FROM:</b>	Alberta Precision Laboratories
<b>RE:</b>	<b>Formalin-Fixed Specimens; <i>Exempt Human Specimen Packaging</i></b>

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## PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE

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### Key Message

- Formalin-fixed specimens can be classified as “Exempt Human Specimens” and shipped under Section 1.42 of the Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) Regulations because:
  - Human specimens that have been chemically fixed and preserved in a way that inactivates infectious agents qualify as *Exempt Human Specimens*.
  - Formalin-fixed tissues are not expected to contain viable pathogens.
- Exempt Human packaging must be designed, constructed, filled, closed, secured, and maintained so that under normal conditions of transport, including handling, there will be no release or damage to the specimen and no risk to workers.

### Background

- Healthcare facilities and medical clinics often employ staff from a variety of professional backgrounds, and some may not have experience packing biological specimens. This can lead to uncertainty about what “*Exempt Human Specimen*” packaging involves, why it is required, and the risks associated with improper packaging. Incorrect handling can create safety hazards for your staff, our team, and patients.
- Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) is sharing this information to ensure the safe and reliable transport of specimens to the laboratory for testing. Proper packaging is essential to maintain specimen integrity and protect everyone involved in the process.
- Exempt Human Specimen:** An exemption where there is **no** reason to believe that the specimen contains an infectious substance; where ‘reason to believe’ means that there is sufficient belief to suggest that the specimens contain infectious substances included in Category A or Category B.

### Packaging Requirements for *Exempt Human Specimens*

- Exempt Human Specimens, although exempt from portions of the TDG Regulations, **must still be packaged safely** to prevent leaks.

The packaging must include:

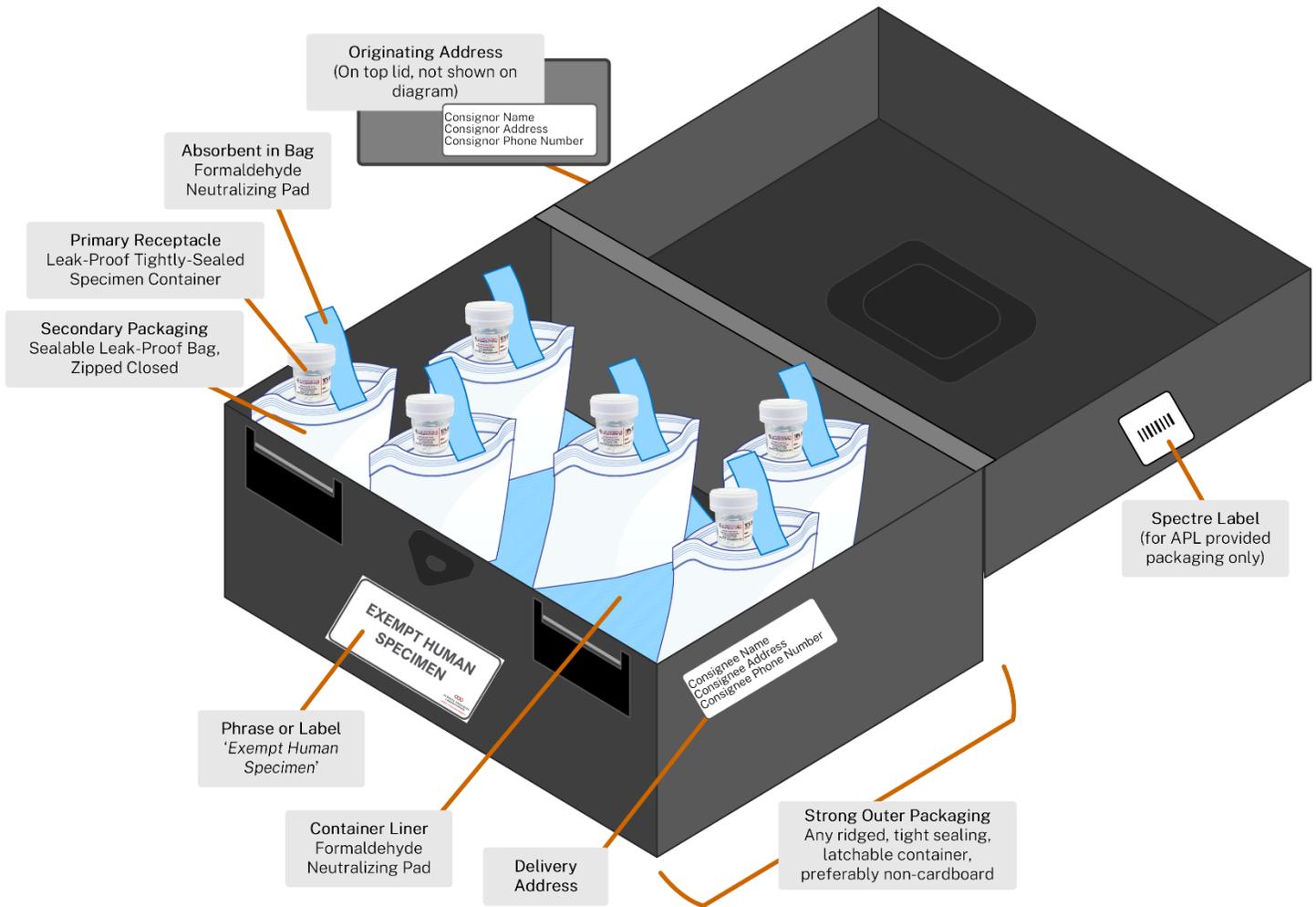
- Primary receptacle:** Leak-proof container holding the specimen, such as:
  - Bucket with gasket lid, or
  - 60ml or 90ml specimen container with properly threaded lid, or
  - Specimen tube with sealed lid/cap.
- Secondary packaging:** Leak-proof, sealed bag that encloses the primary receptacle.
  - Plastic bag with Ziploc seal, or
  - Plastic bag; tightly closed with a zip tie.
  - Do not place the patient requisition inside the bag. Place in separate bag to protect it from moisture.



3. **Outer packaging:** Rigid container that protects the inner layers from physical damage during transport.
  - a. Rigid cardboard box or plastic tote with latch or closing mechanism, or
  - b. Cooler with lid.
4. **Absorbent material:** Placed between the primary and secondary containers to absorb any potential leaks. Formaldehyde neutralizing absorbent pads are preferred.
  - Formaldehyde Neutralizing Absorbent (examples)
    - [PIG Formalin Spill Mat Pad for Neutralizing Formaldehyde - MAT1400 - New Pig](#)
    - [Jones Scientific Products - Products](#)
5. **Marking:** The outer packaging must be clearly marked with “***Exempt Human Specimen***”.
  - a. **Sticker with handwritten “*Exempt Human Specimen*”, or**
  - b. **Sticker with pre-printed “*Exempt Human Specimen*”**
  - These requirements ensure safe transport even though these specimens are not classified as dangerous goods.
  - Ensure packages are sealed before handing them to the courier. Packaged specimens cannot be opened or tampered with during transport.

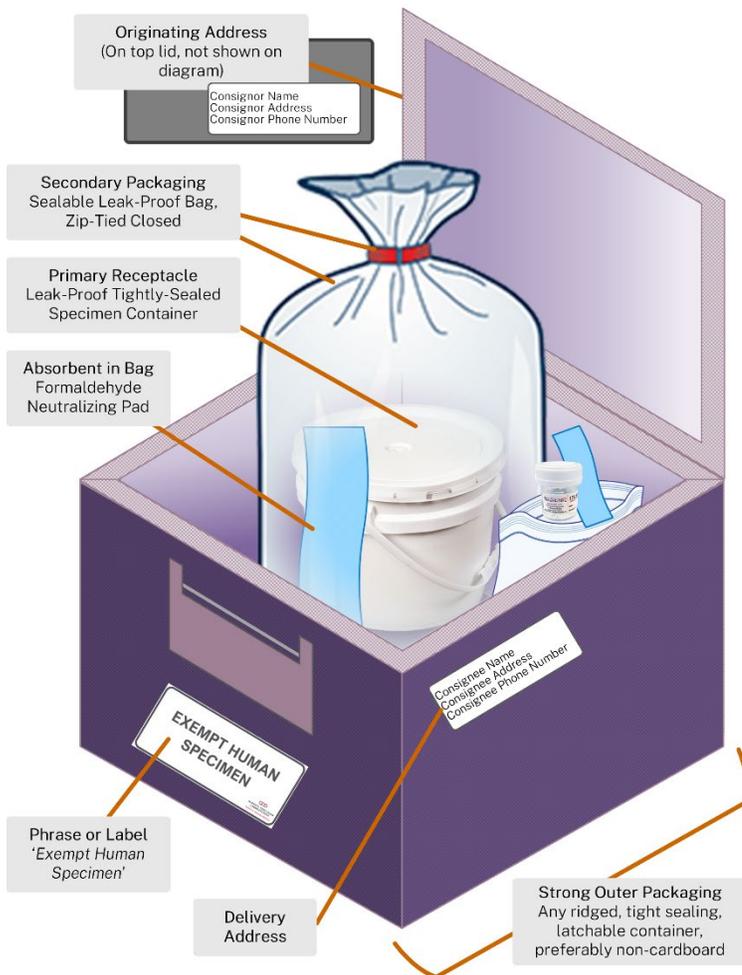


**For Small to Medium Sized  
Specimen Containers**





**For Medium to Large Sized  
Specimen Containers**



**How this will impact you**

- Ensure that formalin-fixed (*Exempt Human*) specimens that are transported to APL are packaged safely, as described above.
- APL Logistics couriers will bring appropriate transport containers with them for the clinic to place properly packaged specimens inside.
- Specimens that are not packaged properly in primary and secondary containers will be refused for transport.
- Private surgical centers may be provided or may need to purchase appropriate primary (specimen) receptacles, secondary packaging and outer packaging to ensure specimens are transported safely.

**Action Required**

- Share this bulletin with those packaging formalin-fixed specimens for transport to APL.



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**Questions/Concerns**

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**Approved by**

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