Specimens are safely and appropriately handled. Handling includes identifying, collecting, labeling, preserving, storing, preparing for transport, documenting and communicating. Specimens include blood, body fluids, tissue or other specimen types removed from the patient including those sent for pathological or gross examination, culture, and sensitivity or other studies.

**Safe and appropriate specimen handling is supported through documented processes and procedures**

**INDICATORS:**
- Written policy and procedures for safe and appropriate handling of specimens include but are not limited to:
  - a statement that all surgical specimens shall be saved unless designated for discard by provincial legislation and/or facility policy
  - surgical specimens designated for discard are listed in facility policy
  - specimen containment
  - specimen identification
  - specimen transfer from the sterile field
  - specimen labeling on and off the sterile field
  - chain of custody for the specimen, including any differences between private vs. contracted cases
  - documentation including laboratory requisition, health care record, chain of custody, verbal/written communication
  - verification of correct information before transferring the specimen (e.g. specimen type, patient information)
  - storage and maintenance of specimens until transfer
  - transfer or facilitation of transfer of the specimen for examination including name and address of receiving laboratory
  - contact information for the laboratory should specimen handling questions arise
  - responsibility for ensuring that reports are received by the appropriate individuals
  - reporting and responding to specimen handling errors and near misses
SPECIMEN HANDLING

- Procedures for the safe and appropriate handling of specimens are followed
- Staff are educated regarding the safe and appropriate handling of specimens at orientation, annually and when policy and procedures are updated

### Specimen collection procedures ensure patient identification and specimen quality

**INDICATORS:**

- Specimen collection and handling needs are verified prior to procedure start
- Collection containers are of an adequate size to easily contain a specimen
- A separate container is provided for each specimen as appropriate
- Specimens are handed off the sterile field as soon as possible
- Specimen containers are labeled immediately when a specimen is delivered to any container or contained area on or off the sterile field
- Specimen identity and required testing is confirmed with the surgeon
- Specimens are sequentially numbered as appropriate
- Fixative/preservatives are stored and handled in a safe manner
- Appropriate fixative/preservatives are added to the specimen container
- Specimen labeling includes but is not limited to:
  - patient identification using a minimum of two identifiers
  - specimen type and site/source, as appropriate
  - date and time of collection
  - sequential number, as appropriate
  - fixative/preservative hazard label, as appropriate
  - biohazard label, as appropriate
- A complete, accurate and legible requisition accompanies the specimen
- Requisition identifiers match the specimen and health care record identifiers

### Specimen collection and chain of custody is appropriately documented

**INDICATORS:**

- Specimens are accurately and legibly labeled at each step of the process
- Type/source and number of specimens sent to the lab are documented in the health care record
- Chain of custody is kept as simple as possible in order to limit the number of specimen handoffs
SPECIMEN HANDLING

- A log tracking specimens from the OR to the laboratory is maintained and includes but is not limited to:
  - patient identification
  - specimen type and site/source, as appropriate
  - date and time of specimen log in
  - name of each surgical team member involved in specimen handling
  - name and signature of person sending the specimen
  - time of transfer of specimen to laboratory
  - name of laboratory receiving the specimen
  - name of person in lab receiving the specimen

Specimen transportation procedures ensure specimen quality and integrity

INDICATORS:

- Specimens are held and transported at appropriate temperatures
- Acceptable time limits between collection and delivery to a laboratory are established
- The responsibility for delivery of specimens to the laboratory is clearly defined
- Transportation is in compliance with the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations and other legislation
- Courier systems, if used, are monitored to ensure staff and appropriate transportation and delivery

Specimen results are reviewed

INDICATORS:

- Reports are received by the appropriate individuals
- An audit process is in place to ensure the receipt of reports
- Reports are reviewed by the appropriate individuals
- Patients are notified of specimen results as appropriate
REFERENCES


Taking steps to protect patients from specimen-handling errors. OR Manager. 2008;24(12):1-3.