

Packaging samples for suspected influenza A/H1N1 ('swine flu') (Category B): guidance for healthcare professionals



There has been some confusion regarding the exact procedures to follow when managing samples associated with the recent influenza A/H1N1 ('swine flu') outbreak.

To clarify, when you contact your local health protection unit (HPU) to inform them that you have identified a possible case, they will provide you with a pack for taking a specimen.

This pack will also contain the packaging (sealable plastic bag, screw-top plastic canister, pre-labelled box) for the samples to be contained once you have taken them. The pack will also include instructions on how to use this packaging (as detailed here).

This packaging will be Category B(UN 3373) compliant. Should you have any further queries, please contact your local HPU.

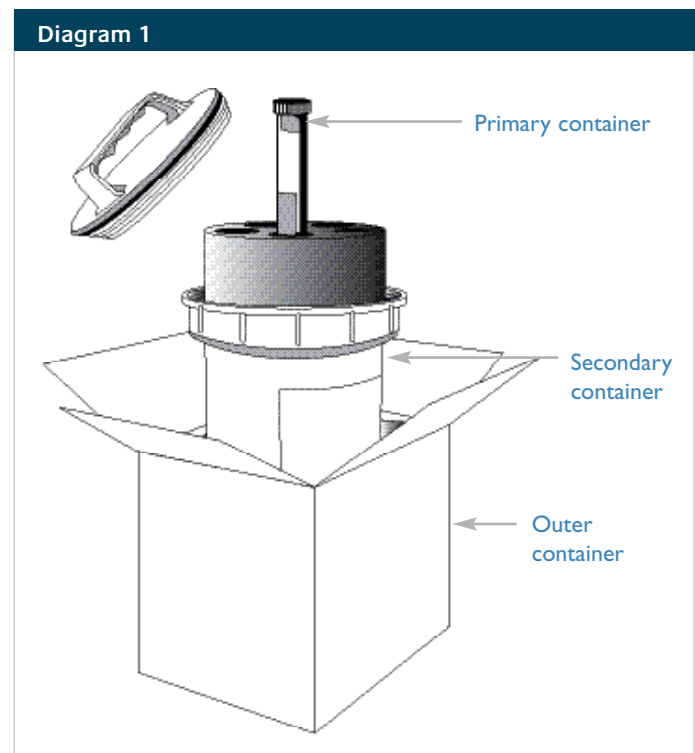
Correct packaging

All suspected swine flu samples must be packaged according to appropriate Category B (UN 3373) packaging.

This provides the required containment of the sample, thus minimising risks (such as infection) to couriers and laboratory staff handling the package.

In addition, a well packaged sample is more likely to arrive intact, uncontaminated and be processed/ reported on in a timely manner.

All samples must be packaged using triple packaging. Triple packaging provides three layers of containment to protect the substances being shipped. These layers are primary, secondary and outer containers. The following diagram shows the basic concept of triple packages.

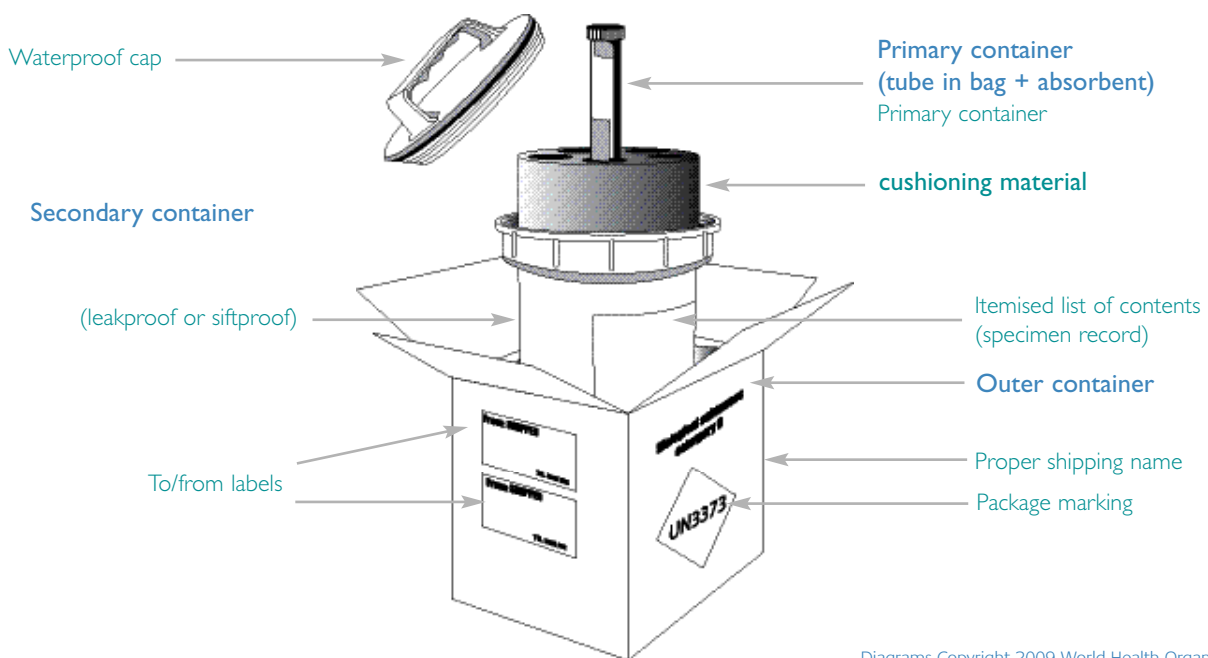


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Category B packaging requirements

Diagram 2



Steps for packaging Category B samples

1. Place sample in leak-proof tube.
2. Wrap tube in absorbent material.
3. Place in plastic bag (preferably with biohazard label) and seal (primary container).
4. Place sealed bag in cushioning material (such as bubble wrap).
5. Place cushioned primary container in secondary container.
6. Close secondary container and place in the outer cardboard box.
7. Insert laboratory test instructions/request form and description of materials.
8. Close outer container.
9. Affix biohazard sticker and secure outer packaging.
10. Ensure the box is correctly labelled with the delivery address and contact numbers.

Please also ensure that the package is not handled with contaminated laboratory gloves.

Further guidance

- Instructions for shipments of swine influenza A(H1N1) specimens and virus isolates to WHO Collaborating Centres for influenza are available on the WHO website at:
www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/swineflu/instructions-shipments/en/index.html
- The HPA has produced a film (that can be viewed using QuickTime software on a PC or Mac) to provide guidance for referring laboratories on how to package samples to the required standard. This can be found at:
www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1195733774690
- QuickTime can be downloaded free at:
www.apple.com/quicktime/download