Clients submitting samples of microorganism to CABI are advised of the need to follow international regulations for the postage of biological samples.

Guidance documents

These guidelines together with current information on international postal regulations provided by IATA (International Air Transport Association) should be followed when sending biological samples to UK or overseas.

Each country has its own regulations governing the packaging and transport of biological material in domestic mail. A list of these should be obtained from the relevant postal service in the country of origin.

Categories of Infectious Substances
Infectious substances are defined as substances which are known or are reasonably expected to contain pathogens. Infectious substances are divided into the following categories:

Category A:
An infectious substance which is transported in a form that when exposure to it occurs, is capable of causing permanent disability, life-threatening or fatal disease in otherwise healthy humans or animals. These include microorganisms in hazard group 3.

Category B:
An infectious substance which does not meet the criteria for inclusion in Category A. These include microorganisms in hazard group 2.

A list of microorganism in hazard categories 2 and 3 is published by the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (UK). See http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc208.pdf

Many microorganisms in ACDP hazard group 1 are also capable of causing infections, either in immunocompromised patients or as opportunistic colonisers and should treated as Category B Infectious Substances.

Please note: Although CABI does accept for processing, samples known to be human pathogens of Category A, it is always possible that an unknown organism submitted for identification could be of this category. For this reason it is recommended that clients submitting unknown microorganism for identification follow procedures as for Category A Infectious Substances.

Packaging requirements for Infectious Substances in Category A
Infectious substances in Category A, designated as UN 2814 (Infectious Substance affecting humans) or UN 2900 (Infectious Substance affecting animals) must be transported in packaging that meets the UN class 6.2 specifications and complies with Packaging Instruction P620. (See WHO ‘Guidance on Regulations for the Transport of Infectious Substances 2011-12’ Annex 3).

To meet this requirement, triple containment is required as follows:

- Samples must be prepared in a primary leak-proof receptacle (e.g. tubes, bottles or ampoules of glass, metal or plastic)
- Primary receptacles must be placed in a secondary leak-proof container approved for use with certified packaging.
- Rigid crush-proof outer packaging is required that meets certified standards.
• If multiple primary receptacles are used, they must be individually wrapped to as to prevent contact between them.
• Each primary receptacle must have a leak-proof seal. If screw tops are used for bottles or tubes, these must be secured by positive means e.g. tape or paraffin sealing wax.
• Absorbent material must be placed between the primary receptacles and secondary packaging, sufficient to absorb the entire contents within the package.
• An itemized list of contents must be enclosed between the secondary packaging and outer packaging.

Labeling and documentation requirements for Category A Infectious Substances
UN approved ‘Infectious Substance’ labeling must be applied to the package (See WHO Guidance on Regulations for the Transport of Infectious Substances 2011-12 p11.)

Documentation to be prepared and signed by the shipper is as follows:

• The shipper’s Declaration for Dangerous Goods
• A packing list/pro forma invoice that includes the receiver’s name, address, the number of packages, details of contents, weight and value.
• An import and/or export permit and/or declaration if required.
• To be prepared by the shipper/shipper’s agent:
• An air waybill is required for air transport or an equivalent document for road, rail and sea shipments.

Packaging requirements for Infectious Substances in Category B
Infectious substances in category B (designated as UN 3373) must be transported in packaging that meets the UN Packaging Instruction P650. (See WHO ‘Guidance on Regulations for the Transport of Infectious Substances 2011-12’ Annex 4)

Triple containment requirements are:
• Samples must be prepared in a primary leak-proof receptacle (e.g. tubes, bottles or ampoules of glass, metal or plastic)
• Primary receptacles must be placed in a secondary leak-proof container approved for use with certified packaging.
• Rigid crush-proof outer packaging is required that meets certified standards.
• If multiple primary receptacles are used, they must be individually wrapped to as to prevent contact between them.
• Each primary receptacle must have a leak-proof seal. If screw tops are used for bottles or tubes, these must be secured by positive means e.g. tape or paraffin sealing wax.
• Absorbent material must be placed between the primary receptacle and secondary packaging, sufficient to absorb the entire contents within the package.
• An itemized list of contents must be enclosed between the secondary packaging and outer packaging.

Labeling requirements for Category B Infectious Substances
UN 3373 approved labeling must be applied to the package (See WHO ‘Guidance on Regulations for the Transport of Infectious Substances’ 2011-12, p15). Labeling should state ‘Biological Substance Category B.’ In addition; the name and address of the shipper and consignee must be provided on each package. The name and telephone number of a person responsible must be provided on the air waybill or on the package.

Dried biological specimens
These regulations do not apply when submitting samples of dead, dried material for identification. However, sturdy packaging is necessary to avoid damage to the material in transit.

The address to send samples is:
Microbial Services, CABI
Bakeham Lane, Egham
Surrey, TW20 9TY, UK