

As part of the ongoing response to COVID-19, support from State Agencies has been requested for the transport of critical specimens to the Wadsworth Center for testing of SARS-CoV-2.

Agencies tasked with transportation of specimens are serving in a transport role only. After a specimen is collected by a healthcare professional from an individual, it is packaged by a sample collection team in triple-containment including a hard-sided outer container. The specimens are packaged to meet DOT regulation and are very safe for transport by law enforcement and other partners. Millions of specimens are transported safely each year using the type of packaging that is being utilized for COVID-19 testing.

Specimen collection operations led by State Office of Emergency Management occurring regionally include healthcare workers assigned to collect samples from homes. In these instances, the healthcare workers collecting specimens are instructed and trained to remove and dispose of the personal protective equipment (PPE) either on-site or, if not possible, in a bag/container that can be closed. They should perform hand hygiene (e.g. with alcohol-based hand rub) and are then considered free of contamination. The drivers do not need PPE as long as they do not enter the residences. Doctors and nurses in hospitals will see a patient using appropriate PPE, remove it, dispose of it, and perform hand hygiene. They are then safe to move on to see another patient. This situation is analogous.

NYSDOH has provided separately a link to a recorded training for transporters to ensure those assigned to this task can recognize appropriate packaging, understand the role of the specimen transporter, and establish points of contact for any questions or concerns in accepting a package for transport. The packages are very secure. If a vehicle is involved in an accident and the shippers are placed properly on the floorboard in the back seat of the automobile, the packaging is designed to withstand car accidents. The New York State Police have been transporting biothreat and chemical threat samples to Wadsworth Center for decades using a similar type of shipper that is being utilized for this effort.

The ongoing support of workers is critical to accomplishing the objectives of critical specimen transport in response to COVID-19. Additional questions or concerns related to packaging and transportation of specimens may be directed to the NYSDOH Office of Health Emergency Preparedness at OHEP@health.ny.gov, which coordinates with Wadsworth Center and other DOH program areas on these efforts.