Specimen Labeling

Proper identification of specimens is vital for the accurate reporting of test results for your patients. The “gold standard” for specimen labeling is to include at least two patient identifiers on all patient samples.

All patient samples must include the following identifiers:
- Last Name, First Name
- Date of Birth

Patient name and date of birth also must match the test orders. Patient specimens received without two identifiers will be rejected for testing and require recollection. Specimen containers must be labeled on the containers and not on the container’s lid. Culture specimens must also include site of specimen collection (i.e. left eye) Multiple specimens taken at different times from the same patient must also include the date and time of collection. All specimens submitted on a slide (Pap smear, WBC differential, Gram’s Stain, etc.) must be labeled on the frosted end of the slide with a lead pencil.

The following may cause delays in testing:
- Not labeling the specimen with patient’s first and last name and date of birth.
- Labeling the specimen with illegible handwriting.
- Labeling the specimen with a name (such as a nickname) that does not match the name submitted on the test request.
- Labeling the lid of the container that contains the specimen. Lids get removed.
- Labeling slides with ink. Ink will be washed away during staining. Use pencil.
- Writing on containers or labels with non-permanent ink, such as gel pens.

Specimens will be rejected in the following situations:
- Multiple patient specimens and only one requisition in the same bag.
- Requisition and specimen do not match patient identifiers.
- Specimen is misidentified, wrong patient identifiers.
- Specimen is unlabeled, no unique identifier on specimen.

If specimen relabeling is requested, a pathologist must approve this. In addition the person identifying the specimen must come to the Mercy Clinical Laboratory to identify the specimen, label the specimen, and complete appropriate paperwork to re-label.