

Tissue & Cytology Submission Instructions

Proper specimen identification, handling, fixation, and transportation are essential for timely processing and accurate diagnosis. Please follow the instructions below when submitting tissue and/or cytology specimens to San Diego Pathology.

1. Requisition Form

A completed requisition form must accompany each specimen and should be filled out completely.

The requisition should include:

- Patient's full name
- Date of birth and medical record number, as applicable
- Patient address and other required demographic information
- Ordering clinician's name
- Specimen source/site
- Pertinent clinical information
- Relevant previous history, as applicable
- Requested studies or special stains, as applicable
- Billing information
- A copy of the patient's insurance card, as applicable

Clinical information should contain sufficient detail for the pathologist to understand the clinical questions that need to be addressed.

The information on the requisition must correspond with the information on the specimen container. Errors or discrepancies in patient information, specimen identification, or labeling may result in rejection or delay in diagnosis.

2. Specimen Labeling

Each specimen container must be clearly labeled with:

- Patient's full name
- A second patient identifier
- Specimen source/site

All required identification information must be on the specimen container itself, not on the lid.

When multiple specimens are submitted, each specimen must be placed in a separate, appropriately labeled container.

The specimen source/site on the container must correspond with the information provided on the requisition.

3. Tissue Specimen Fixation

Routine tissue specimens should be placed in an appropriately sized, tightly sealed container containing 10% neutral buffered formalin (NBF). See below for tissue special handling.

Use a volume of formalin that is at least 10 times the volume of the tissue for optimal fixation.

Each formalin container should have an appropriate biohazard/formalin warning label.

Tissue Fixation Time

Proper and timely fixation are critical for tissue preparation and diagnosis.

- Routine tissue should be placed in formalin ASAP less than 1 hour of removal.
- Breast specimens should be placed in formalin ASAP less than 1 hour of removal (cold ischemic time).
- Breast specimen fixation time must be documented and should not exceed 72 hours for optimal ER/PR testing.

WARNING: NBF is an eye and skin irritant. It is toxic by ingestion, inhalation, and by direct contact. It also has possible carcinogenic potential.

4. Tissue Special Handling

Some specimens require handling that differs from routine formalin fixation. If special studies are requested or anticipated, please contact San Diego Pathology for instructions before collecting or submitting the specimen.

Examples may include specimens requiring:

- Chromosomal Analysis – Place fresh tissue in RPMI (obtain from SDP)
- Flow cytometry - Place fresh tissue in RPMI (obtain from SDP)
- Fresh/unfixed tissue – Refrigerate until transport
- Gout – Submit specimen in 100% alcohol (reagent or alcohol)
- Immunofluorescence studies – Place fresh tissue in Michel's (obtain from SDP)
- Microbiology- Submit fresh or in a small amount of sterile saline in a separate specimen container and a request form from the patient's insurance-approved laboratory are preferred whenever possible. If only one specimen container is available, contact the laboratory for instructions before dividing the specimen.

5. Cytology Specimen Fixation

Add 30 mL Cytology Preservative to the specimens from the following collections sites:

- Washings and Brushings (Bronchial, Esophageal, Respiratory, etc.)
- Body Cavity Fluids (Pleural, Peritoneal, Pericardial)
- Urine (Voided or Washings)
- Sputum - Securely replace top and shake vigorously to liquefy.
- Fine Needle Aspiration - Prepared smears may also be received air-dried (for DiffQuik stain) or alcohol fixed (for Pap stain).
- Cerebrospinal Fluid - Add 30mL Cell Solutions Red Lytic Cytology Preservative.

6. Specimen Transport

All specimens must be submitted in an appropriately labeled, well-constructed container with a secure lid to prevent leakage during transport.

Place the specimen container in a biohazard specimen transport bag.

The completed requisition should be placed in the outer/document pocket of the transport bag, separate from the specimen container.

For multiple specimens, each specimen must be submitted in its own appropriately labeled container.

7. Specimen Rejection / Deficiencies

Specimens received by San Diego Pathology are reviewed for deficiencies that may result in rejection or a delay in processing and diagnosis.

Examples include:

- No requisition form
- No physician/ordering clinician name
- No pertinent clinical information, as applicable
- Incomplete requisition
- Unlabeled specimen
- Patient name on the requisition does not match the specimen
- Specimen site on the requisition does not match the container
- Specimen submitted by an unauthorized source
- Any syringe with an attached needle

These deficiencies may result in specimen rejection, additional clarification, or delay in diagnosis.

Questions About Specimen Submission?

If you are unsure how a specimen should be collected, labeled, fixed, or transported, please contact San Diego Pathology before submitting the specimen whenever possible.

Proper specimen handling begins at the time of collection and is essential to providing an accurate and timely pathologic diagnosis.