

# Bacteriology/Mycology Laboratory Guidelines

## I. SPECIMEN COLLECTION

- **Proper site preparation** is critical to ensure correct culture interpretation and should be nothing short of a surgical prep. Many etiologic agents can also be found as normal flora and can distort culture interpretation as well as overgrow and obscure the true pathogen.
- Collect a **sample size** sufficient for the tests desired. A swab should never be submitted over tissue or fluid. Inadequate specimen may yield false negative results.

## II. TRANSPORT

- **Act quickly**; the fresher the sample the better the chance of recovering significant organisms. Submit to the laboratory using overnight shipping. On weekends and holidays, contact the laboratory in advance for an alternate location for submission.
- **Select the proper transport device** to protect the specimen and maximize culture interpretation.
  - ▶ Port-A-Cul Vials and tubes provide the greatest flexibility for fluids and tissues/swabs, respectively, and will support aerobes, anaerobes, and fungi. Carefully place tissue or swab(s) down in the gel inside the tube and when you must use a swab, submit one for each test requested. Fluids are overlaid on the gel in the vial after cleansing the stopper surface. Because anaerobes cannot tolerate oxygen for even short periods of time, place specimen in transport device immediately.
  - ▶ Fecal samples should be submitted in a screw-capped specimen cup (3 grams to one-half full for large animal submissions and 1 gram for small animal submissions). Keep cool during transport and submit within 24-36 hours.
  - ▶ Washes for aerobic or fungal culture should be submitted in a sterile container. Volume is critical.
  - ▶ Hair and scale for dermatophyte culture do not require special transport conditions and can tolerate dry, ambient conditions readily.
- **Keep specimens cool, not frozen.** Microorganisms are fragile and susceptible to extremes in temperature. Adverse conditions will affect recovery of significant pathogens and may promote overgrowth by normal flora. All specimens must be **shipped overnight with a cool pack.**

Exceptions: Hair & scale for dermatophytes  
Blood cultures  
Specimens for isolation of *Pythium* species or zygomycetes.

## III. PATIENT INFORMATION

- **Identify specimen, method of collection, tests desired** and **provide as much history** as possible. Include the name of any antimicrobial drugs administered, the time of withdrawal, and a list of any known or suspected pathogen(s). This information increases the probability that significant results will be recognized and properly interpreted.
- Please contact the laboratory when in doubt on test selection or sample collection. We can be reached by phone (334-844-2658) or email (vmbact@auburn.edu).