

BRL Requirements for Labeling Specimens

The Joint Commission requires that two patient identifiers be used on all specimens to ensure accurate linkage of the patient, the specimen, and the test results in the medical record. Specifically, we require the full patient name (first and last) and either medical record number (for inpatients) or date of birth (for outpatients) to be attached to the specimen. Your assistance in educating all staff involved with specimen collection and labeling is appreciated to help ensure the highest quality care and to protect patient safety.

- Two patient identifiers are necessary *on the specimen container* (for BRL clients, generally the patient full name and date of birth). Do not rely on a label that comes from the manufacturer to prompt for these required identifiers; BRL can supply labels to assist you. It is not sufficient to supply this information only on accompanying paperwork.
- Labeling errors can lead to potentially serious misinterpretations of test results when specimens with similar identifying information enter an environment where many thousands of specimens are handled each day and results must be accurately associated with your patient among millions.
- A specimen labeling problem cannot be “fixed.” Management of a mislabeled specimen may mean that you are asked to recollect the specimen, and this is the usual outcome to be expected. Requests for testing a mislabeled specimen will need formal documented approval of senior management and/or the medical director of the testing laboratory as well as the ordering clinician or other responsible caregiver. Special considerations and comments in the medical record will document individual management considerations for these rare instances.
- “Precious” or important specimens (invasively obtained, timed, or irreplaceable specimens) may deserve more attention, but this does not negate the risk associated with testing inadequately labeled specimens. Precious specimens will be handled on a case-by-case basis.
- Specimens are not discarded – they are generally kept for 7 days, even if they have not been accepted for testing, so there is time for discussion about labeling issues when necessary.

We welcome your feedback, and appreciate your patience as we all adjust to these expectations. Please call us at (413) 794-4500 with any questions or concerns.

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