

Integrity is everything.

How to send micro samples to your contract lab
without compromising test quality.

Sending samples out for testing might seem like a simple, regular part of your operations, but there are important steps to follow to help ensure sample quality isn't compromised in the process.



1. Not all neutralizing buffers are created equal.

Consider the sanitizer used in your facility and choose a sample collection device with an appropriate neutralizing buffer. If your contract lab sends sample collection devices as part of their service when you order a test, be sure what they're sending works with the sanitizer used in your facility. If the sanitizer used in your plant changes, be sure to notify your contract lab of the change. More detail on the effectiveness of various neutralizing media against common sanitizers can be found in the 3M Food Safety Environmental Monitoring Handbook ([Link](#)).



2. Keep it contamination-free

Samples that have been collected must remain in aseptic condition during transport. To achieve this, look for a sample bag with a seal, like 3M™ Sample Collection, Preparation and Processing Products, which are gamma irradiated and free of contamination.



3. Back, forth and twist

If you're using a 3M™ Sponge-Stick, before you're ready to close the bag, use this trick to remove the stick attached to the sponge: Hold the sponge in place by clamping two fingers around it (on the outside of the bag). Then, with your other hand, take the stick and bend it back and forth along the perforated line near the sponge. Finally, twist to remove the stick from the bag.





4. Write on

Be sure to label sample bags clearly. The more context your contract lab partner has (for instance, where in the plant the sample was taken, who collected the sample and the date and time it was collected), the more informed your contract lab partner will be.



5. Refrigeration is key

After collecting your sample, refrigerate it as soon as possible until it's nearly ready to be picked up by the courier. Packing into a cooler within an hour of pickup is a best practice and helps to ensure that samples remain at the appropriate temperature.



6. Test within the first 48 hours

After collection, samples need to be tested within 48 hours to avoid compromising the quality of the sample. This is one of the reasons why many food processors that outsource choose a contract lab partner within 100 miles of their site. This is also why it's so important to coordinate the sample collection process with courier pickup time and travel time to the lab.



7. Get packing

To keep samples in optimal condition for testing, keep them refrigerated while other samples are being collected until a time that's closer to courier pickup. Refrigeration is recommended over storage in a cooler. Once the courier pickup time is near, prepare to pack the samples into a cooler for transport. Ensure the inside of the cooler is clean and disinfected to avoid cross contamination. Have enough ice packs in the cooler to keep your sample chilled during transit, maintaining a temperature range of 4 to 8 degrees Celsius.

Better testing begins with better samples — and better samples are obtained when you use the best collection tools. 3M™ Sample Collection Products are designed specifically for microbial surface sampling. Make environmental testing and product sampling easy and convenient with the full line of 3M products.



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