

## 5-5: Sample storage, retention and disposal

### Sample storage

Written policies should be developed that include:

- description of what samples should be stored;
- retention time;
- location (consider ease of access);
- conditions for storage, such as atmospheric and temperature requirements;
- system for storage organization—one method is to store samples by day of receipt or accession number.

### Sample retention

Set a laboratory policy for retention of each type of sample. Some samples can be quickly discarded and others may need to be retained for longer periods. Monitor stored samples and do not keep for longer than necessary, as refrigerator and freezer space may be limited. Sample freeze/thaw cycles must be monitored, as samples may deteriorate under these conditions.

Planning is required for samples that may need long-term storage. An organized, accessible system using computer tracking would be useful for these samples. The inventory of stored samples should be reviewed at specified intervals to determine when they should be discarded.

### Sample referral

When referring samples to other laboratories for testing:

- Obtain a laboratory handbook with detailed procedures from each laboratory.
- Ensure the sample is labelled correctly, in the correct container, accompanied by a requisition form that specifies the required test(s) and includes the sending laboratory's contact information.
- Carefully monitor samples that are referred:
  - keep a record of all tests and samples referred, date of referral and name of person referring the test;
  - record and report results received for each referred sample;
  - monitor turnaround times and record any problems encountered.

### Sample disposal

The laboratory is responsible for ensuring that disposal of all laboratory waste is handled in a safe manner. To ensure proper disposal of patient samples:

- Develop a policy for sample disposal; apply local as well as country regulations for disposal of medical waste.
- Establish and follow procedures to disinfect samples prior to disposal.