

Top ten tips for reducing sample collection errors

1. Before a sample is collected **ALWAYS** check the patient's identity to ensure the sample is collected from the correct patient.
2. **Ensure the correct bottle is selected for the test(s) requested.** Many sample tubes contain preservatives or anticoagulants. Using the incorrect bottle can give rise to incorrect results so samples will not be analysed.
3. **Avoid haemolysis.** Use the vacutainer system to collect blood (check expiry date before use) and mix samples gently by inversion 3-4 times clotting studies (blue top bottles and 8-10 times all other samples. If you have to use a normal syringe carefully remove the needle and tube cap and slowly eject the blood into the sample tube.
4. **Use the correct order of draw.** When more than one sample is collected during a single venepuncture ensure the bottle types are collected in the correct order to avoid sample contamination.
5. **Ensure sample bottles are appropriately filled.** If properly used vacutainer tubes will automatically fill to the correct volume. This is important for tubes containing anticoagulant and for clotting studies (blue top bottles). Over and under-filled tubes cannot be processed.
6. **ALWAYS label the sample at the patient's side to prevent patient and specimen mix ups**
7. **Label samples correctly.** All samples **MUST** be labeled with **ALL** of the following information:
 - a. NHS number or other unique identity number
 - b. Patients first name and surname
 - c. Date of birth
 - d. Date and time of specimen collection
 - e. Initials or signature of the specimen collector
8. **ALWAYS** verify the accuracy of specimen labelling before you or the patient leaves the treatment area
9. **Use correct urine containers.** Use vacutainers with borate preservative for urine microscopy and bacterial culture (olive top) and plain containers (beige top) for biochemistry and most other microbiology and cytology tests.
10. If in doubt contact the laboratory or refer to the laboratory user guide
<http://www.avon.nhs.uk/nbtpathology>