

SAMPLING CHECKLIST

Get the sample right the first time

Most failed samples are not a lab problem. They are a container, temperature or timing problem. Work through this checklist before, during and after sampling. It covers water, food and swab samples.

1 Before you leave for the sampling point

Five minutes here saves a repeat visit later.

- ☐ Test request form completed and signed, with every test you need listed by name.
- ☐ Correct containers collected from BioSel, still sealed and within their expiry date.
- ☐ Cooler box packed with enough frozen ice bricks to hold 1 to 5 °C for the full trip.
- ☐ Thermometer in the cooler box so you can record the temperature on arrival.
- ☐ Sterile gloves, alcohol wipes and a permanent marker packed.
- ☐ Delivery time agreed with the lab. Micro samples must arrive the same working day.

2 Containers, use the right one every time

The wrong container is the single most common reason a sample is rejected.

- ☐ Water for microbiology: sterile bottle only. Never rinse it and never reuse a cool drink bottle.
- ☐ Chlorinated water for microbiology: bottle must contain sodium thiosulphate to neutralise the chlorine.
- ☐ Water for chemistry: clean bottle, filled to the top with no air gap.
- ☐ Food and feed: original sealed packaging where possible, otherwise a new sterile sample bag.
- ☐ Swabs: pre-moistened swab in neutralising buffer, used straight from the sleeve.
- ☐ Lids closed properly and taped if there is any chance of leaking in transit.

3 Taking the sample

- ☐ Hands sanitised and clean gloves on before opening anything.
- ☐ Tap sampling: remove attachments, disinfect the outlet, then run the tap for two minutes before filling.
- ☐ Bottle opened only at the moment of filling. Do not touch the inside of the lid or neck.
- ☐ Micro bottles filled to the shoulder, not to the brim. Leave the air gap for mixing.
- ☐ Enough material taken for every test requested. When unsure, take more rather than less.
- ☐ Sample taken at the point that reflects the risk, not the most convenient point.

4 Temperature, from the moment you seal it

The cold chain starts at the sampling point, not in the car park.

- ☐ Sample into the cooler box immediately after sealing.
- ☐ Chilled samples held between 1 and 5 °C. Cold, not frozen.
- ☐ Frozen samples stay frozen for the whole trip. A thawed frozen sample is not testable.
- ☐ Ice bricks separated from the sample with cardboard or bubble wrap so nothing freezes by contact.
- ☐ Cooler box out of direct sun and never left in a closed boot.
- ☐ Temperature recorded on the form when you hand the sample over.

5 Timing, the clock starts when you sample

Every result is only valid inside its holding time. Late samples are reported as such or rejected.

- ☐ Time and date of sampling written down at the point of sampling, not from memory afterwards.
- ☐ Microbiological water samples delivered within 6 hours and analysed within 24 hours.
- ☐ Chemical water samples delivered within 24 hours unless the lab has agreed otherwise.
- ☐ Food, feed and swab samples delivered within 24 hours, chilled throughout.
- ☐ Sampling planned so you are not arriving after the drop off cut off time.
- ☐ Lab phoned in advance if you are sampling late in the day or on a Friday.

Quick reference

Print this page and keep it in the cooler box. Confirm the exact requirement with BioSel when you collect your containers, as some tests have shorter holding times.

Sample type	Container	Volume or amount	Temperature	Deliver within
Water microbiology	Sterile bottle with sodium thiosulphate for chlorinated water	250 ml to 500 ml	1 to 5 °C	6 hours
Water chemistry	Clean bottle, filled with no air gap	1 to 2 litres	1 to 5 °C	24 hours
Food and feed	Original sealed pack or new sterile sample bag	200 g to 500 g	Chilled 1 to 5 °C, or frozen if the product is frozen	24 hours
Environmental swabs	Pre-moistened swab in neutralising buffer	10 cm x 10 cm area per swab	1 to 5 °C	24 hours
Dust	Sealed container or the collection medium supplied by the lab	As specified for the method	Ambient, kept dry	48 hours

6 Labelling and chain of custody

If the lab cannot prove where a sample came from, the result cannot be defended.

- ☐ Every container labelled individually. Never label the cooler box only.
- ☐ Label shows sample identity, exact sampling point, date, time and the sampler name.
- ☐ Written in permanent marker that will survive condensation.
- ☐ Labels on the form and on the bottle match exactly, character for character.
- ☐ Chain of custody form signed by you and signed by the person receiving it.
- ☐ Photo taken of the sampling point and the labelled sample for your own record.

Six reasons samples get rejected

- Sample arrived warm because the cooler box had no ice bricks left.
- Bottle rinsed at the tap before filling, which removed the preservative.
- Micro sample taken on Friday afternoon and delivered on Monday.
- Label on the bottle did not match the label on the request form.
- Sampling time left blank, so the holding time could not be proven.
- Non sterile container used for a microbiological test.

Not sure? Phone before you sample.

One quick call costs you two minutes. A rejected sample costs you a return trip, a second set of containers and a week of waiting. Speak to your nearest laboratory before you go out.

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This checklist is general sampling guidance. Where a specific method, standard or regulator requires something different, that requirement takes precedence. Confirm the exact container, volume and holding time with the laboratory when you collect your containers.