



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Guidance on the opening of unfixed histopathological samples in the COVID-19 crisis

Our advice regarding handling any fresh or poorly fixed specimens from confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases depends on the risk posed by the procedure planned.

The risk of contracting COVID-19 from such a case is through aerosol production if high speed or high pressure tools are used - any procedure likely to do this warrants full personal protective equipment (PPE) in line with those set out in [Guidance for care of deceased during COVID-19 pandemic](#). If possible the procedure should be conducted in a ventilation/fume cupboard. Such procedures are however rare.

The risk of contracting COVID-19 from such a case is through droplet production for other procedures not using high speed or high pressure tools. In general the risks for these cases are similar to those specified for frozen sections and fine needle aspiration (FNAs). The guidance for handling unfixed or poorly fixed specimens in these circumstances is laid out in [RCPath advice on histopathology frozen sections and cytology fine needle aspiration during infectious disease outbreaks](#).

It is appreciated that, for many specimens, it may be impractical to open or handle the specimen in a ventilation/fume cupboard and, in such cases, an alternative well ventilated area should be utilised for the procedure.

See also [COVID-19 Guidance for infection prevention and control in healthcare settings](#) and the Royal College of Pathologists' [Coronavirus: COVID-19 resources hub](#).

Further specific guidance on this is being produced and will be available in due course.

Prepared by Dr Mike Osborn, Chair of The Royal College of Pathologists' Cellular Pathology Specialty Advisory Committee.

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