



# RCPATH advice on the management of histopathology slides, request forms and microscopes during infectious disease outbreaks

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Histopathologists may be affected by infectious disease outbreaks, either personally being unwell or isolating because family members are unwell. The transfer of histology slides, paperwork and microscopes between the workplace and home will facilitate histopathologists working from home if isolating or being shielded. The College guidance on working from home provides advice on governance and other aspects. During infectious disease outbreaks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is sensible to review several aspects of these procedures to reduce the risk of transmission of infection between healthcare staff and patients. This similarly applies to the transfer of slides within a department involving several members of staff.

The approach to this depends on the risk posed by the procedure, as per [the four UK nations' public health guidance](#). This specific advice is informed by Public Health England.

**In this context, there is one main level of increased risk:** contact with droplets – the risk of infection is from contact with droplets produced by a healthcare worker.

## Our advice is as follows

- The risk of transfer of virus from one person to another is a composite of probability of person returning shedding, nature of surface shed on to, ability to mobilise, and any mitigating measures.
- A person returning to work after seven days self isolation is not going to be shedding virus/minimal shedding.
- Slide handling is unlikely to leave behind significant contamination and even less of that will be mobile and transferable as a risk to others.
- Paper/cardboard is drying and absorptive; virus will denature quicker and will be very difficult to mobilise and transfer.
- No decontamination/storage or other safeguards, therefore, is needed for these items.
- Microscopes should be given a quick wipe over with a detergent-based clinical wipe.

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