Packaging and Shipping Category B Infectious Substances

Category B materials are defined as “an infectious substance not in a form capable of causing permanent disability or life-threatening or fatal disease in otherwise health humans or animals when exposure to it occurs. This includes Category B infectious substances transported for diagnostic or investigational purposes.” The proper shipping name and identification number for Category B infectious substances is Biological substance, Category B, UN3373. These substances include specimens taken from patients with a communicable disease such as TB, HIV, or Hepatitis B and samples that are to be tested for infectious pathogens. They may also include samples taken for culture of pathogens that are on the list of Category A agents, but have not yet been propagated and so are not classified as a culture.

US DOT regulation 49 CFR 173.199 outlines the requirements for packaging, marking, and documenting Category B materials. If the specimen is being shipped through UPS or FedEx, the shipper must reference IATA packaging instruction 650 (<http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/cargo/dgr/Pages/download.aspx>, under “Infectious Substances”.

DOT publication “Transporting Infectious Substances Safely” is a free brochure available on the DOT PHMSA website. This brochure includes definitions and examples of Category A infectious substances. <http://www.phmsa.dot.gov/pv_obj_cache/pv_obj_id_54AC1BCBF0DFBE298024C4C700569893C2582700/filename/Transporting_Infectious_Substances_brochure.pdf>

If specimens are taken in a car that is only being used at that time to transport that specimen, it is acceptable to have them in a biohazard bag in a cooler or other rigid container that is secured from spilling or excessive shifting. If the car is being used for other purposes at the same time, the rules above will apply. Special packaging is not required for the above as long as the packaging is strong and able to withstand shipment and required markings and labels are present.