

Bacteria Sample Lab Delivery Time and Reliability

Hold time is the time between sample collection and laboratory analysis (i.e. the time in-transit). **After 30 hours**, the sample is less reliable, receives an “H Qualifier” from the laboratory, and participants are encouraged to re-test for accurate bacteria results.

What determines hold time?

Hold time depends on: amount of time between sample collection and dropping it in the mail; parcel service used; location; and day of shipping. Participants are encouraged to sample shortly before dropping samples in the mail, so most of the hold time is while the sample is in transit with the parcel service. The **location the sample is coming from is the biggest factor in determining hold time**. Participants can use any parcel service they like but most use US Postal Service. Other parcel services are expensive for next day delivery and are still not always on time.

Sampling instructions say it is necessary to mail samples Monday-Wednesday so they can be processed before the weekend. When participants don’t follow these instructions, that can contribute to longer hold times.

Bacteria Hold Times by County

This graph shows the percentage of bacteria samples arriving late for each county. Any county with more than 25% of samples arriving late should inform participants about the potential of unreliable bacteria assessment and refer to the handout: **Contacting a Private Lab for a Bacteria Test**.

