



Known Reference Samples FAQs

Known reference samples are collected in many types of investigations including, but not limited to assaults, sexual assaults, property crimes, etc. Submission of appropriate known reference samples is a key component to the efficient operations of the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory (ASCDL), which then allows the ASCDL to provide more efficient services to its customers. When the ASCDL receives all the pertinent known samples up front, analysis of a case can be completed in a single round of testing. The net result is quicker turnaround times and smaller backlogs.

The information in this bulletin is to assist law enforcement with obtaining the appropriate samples from victims, consent partners, and other innocent persons and ensuring that the samples are properly packaged and submitted to the ASCDL in a timely manner for testing.

Why are we being required to submit known reference samples from victims or other innocent persons when we only need to identify the suspect's DNA?

There are several rules that must be followed for the laboratory to be a participant in the national DNA database (CODIS).¹ One of those rules is that the lab is only permitted to enter DNA profiles from items of evidence when the profile is likely from the perpetrator of the crime. Every effort must be made to ensure that DNA profiles from victims or other innocent persons (e.g. consensual sex partners) are not entered in the database. For example, when a victim has had intimate contact with a consensual sex partner close to the time of a reported assault (three weeks prior to the assault through seven days post assault), there is a reasonable expectation that the DNA from the victim and the consent partner may be recovered from the sexual assault collection kit (SAK) or other submitted evidence. The lab needs to rule those persons out as the source of the DNA profile obtained. If a DNA profile is obtained from evidence and the lab did not have reference samples from the victim and consent partner, there is the potential to inadvertently upload their DNA to the database. Providing these known reference samples ensures that the privacy rights of the victim and consent partners are maintained.

Not infrequently, persons are reluctant to voluntarily provide this type of sample to law enforcement. It is important share the following information with victims and consent partners to help ease their concerns:

- The laboratory is not permitted to enter known reference samples in CODIS.
- Reference samples obtained by consent are also not permitted to be used in other cases.

Appendix A is a script to assist you in providing this information. It can be printed and laminated.

¹ *For more information on what CODIS is, please visit <https://dps.alaska.gov/Comm/CrimeLab/Forensic-Biology/DNA>

How do I collect, package, store and ship my reference samples?

Step 1: Collect the Sample

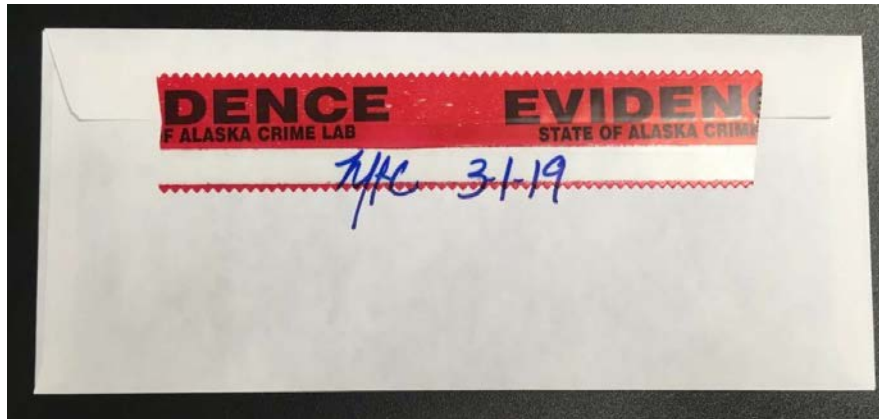
Sterile cotton swabs are the perfect collection device for known reference samples. They can be purchased online and have minimal cost. The laboratory uses Puritan swabs (item 25-806 2PC). Two swabs are preferred so that one can be retained by the lab if retesting is necessary.

The laboratory webpage has a [training video for collection of known samples](#) from convicted offenders and arrestees using the CODIS kit. Although the **CODIS kit SHOULD NOT** be used for collecting known reference samples for case investigations knowns, the video does demonstrate the proper collection of the DNA swab.

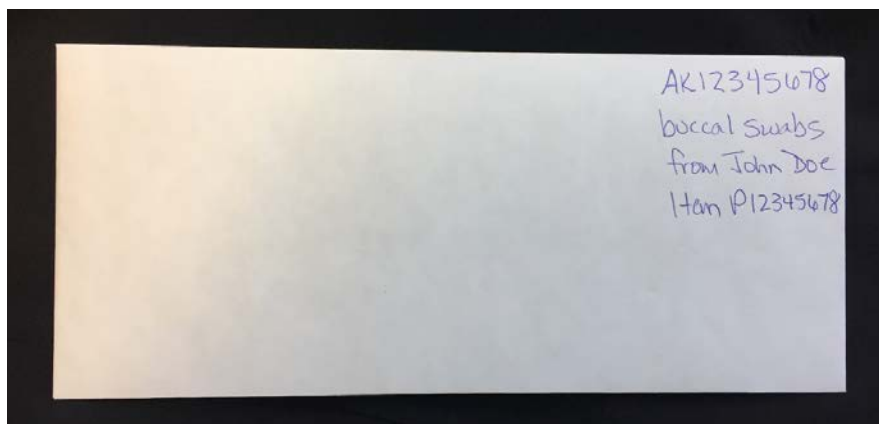
Step 2: Package the Evidence

Once the swabs are collected and dried, they can be placed back in the swab package. The swab package can then be placed in a standard white business envelope. Then, place a proper seal (with your initials and date) on the tape as pictured below. Reference buccal swabs can be stored at room temperature until you are able to submit to the lab.

Other envelopes are acceptable, but DNA evidence MAY NOT be stored in plastic. Brown paper bags are also discouraged as evidence tape does not adhere well over the long term.



Label the envelope with your agency case and item #s, the contents (i.e. reference buccal swabs from John Doe), and any other information required by your agency's policies.



Step 3: Request Testing and Submit

Complete the [Request for Laboratory Services form \(RLS\)](#). The laboratory website has a [training video to assist with proper completion of the RLS](#).

Place the evidence container and the RLS in a larger envelope or box for mailing. Then submit the item to the laboratory with other evidence in the case, or as soon as practicable.

When using the U. S. Postal Service for transmittal of evidence, it is necessary to maintain the proper chain-of-custody. To maintain reasonable control over evidence transmitted in this manner, evidence should be mailed by certified or registered mail with a return receipt requested (or equivalent shipping method such as FedEx, UPS or GoldStreak). This method of shipment allows the sender to maintain a written record of the various stages of transmittal. Use a street or route number in your return address so that evidence may be returned to you by USPS or other shipping agent with a signature of receipt required.

The Crime Laboratory mailing address is:

**State of Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory
4805 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave
Anchorage, AK 99507**

Appendix A

Known Reference Sample Script



Known Reference Samples

The Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory (ASCDL) enters DNA profiles into a database called CODIS to help solve crimes. Every effort is made so DNA profiles from victims or other innocent persons (e.g. consensual sex partners) are not entered into CODIS. In order to rule those persons out as the source of the DNA obtained from crime scene evidence, a known reference sample is collected for comparison. This is collected so that the DNA profile of an innocent person is not put into the CODIS database by mistake. A known reference sample is collected by swabbing the inside of a person's cheek. Providing these known reference samples makes sure that the **privacy rights** of the crime victim, their sex partners, and other innocent persons are maintained.

Providing your DNA sample is the best way to maintain your privacy because:

- The lab is not allowed to enter your reference sample in CODIS;
- Reference samples obtained by **consent** are also not allowed to be used in other cases.