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48-hour curbside recyclable cold chain packout FAQ

October 2026

Cencora's Specialty Distribution Network

Brooks, KY

Cencora will be implementing an upgraded refrigerated packaging solution that is qualified to maintain refrigerated temperature for a minimum of 48 hours, a full 24 hours longer than our current refrigerated packaging.

This FAQ is designed to help you understand the purpose of the updated packaging, what is changing from the current refrigerated packaging configuration, and what to expect when receiving refrigerated products. It also provides guidance on proper product receipt, temperature verification, packaging materials, sustainability benefits, and when to contact support with questions about shipment condition or packout compliance.

Q: How does Cencora pack and ship cold chain products in the Specialty Distribution Network?

A: Products are packed using qualified insulated liners, gel packs, and validated configurations designed to maintain required temperatures throughout transit. Packaging is tailored by season and shipper size to maintain temperature consistency.

Q: How is the Specialty Distribution Network different from the Wholesale Distribution Network for cold chain shipments?

A: The Specialty Distribution Network uses validated packaging solutions designed specifically for temperature-sensitive specialty products, including biologics, with more controlled packout configurations and performance testing to maintain strict temperature ranges during transit.

Q: What do you mean by cold chain?

A: Cold chain is an industry term that is commonly used to refer to anything related to refrigerated product picking, packaging, and shipping.

Q: What should I expect when I receive my shipment?

A: As refrigerated products move throughout the network, our insulated ClimaCell® liners are packaged with a qualified combination of frozen and/or refrigerated gel packs and corrugate dividers packaged according to the corresponding shipper size and seasonal profile to maintain refrigerated product temperature while in transit.

- Once these packages start their journey, the frozen gel packs will begin to thaw to maintain proper temperature and the refrigerated gel packs will act as a buffer to protect against any excess cold temperature.
- When you receive your product, gel packs and refrigerated product should be cool to the touch, not frozen. This is expected and does not automatically indicate a product integrity concern. Once received, unpack the product and place it into a temperature-controlled environment consistent with the product's requirements.

Q: How can I check that my product is the proper temperature when received?

A: To properly check the temperature of your product, we'd encourage you to use a calibrated thermometer and temperature probe to obtain an accurate internal reading of your refrigerated product. Please be sure to use a probe that allows the liner to be closed, which should increase the accuracy of the reading; we do not recommend using an infrared thermometer, as the liner wouldn't be closed using this option.

There are three factors to help support confidence in the reliability and integrity of your delivered product:

- 01 Appropriate number of gel packs are included in the liner. Please refer to the cold chain packout guide to learn more.
- 02 Gel packs and refrigerated product are cool to the touch, not frozen.
- 03 Your product was delivered as expected.

Q: What is changing with the new 48-hour packout?

A: As part of our transition to improved sustainable packaging, you may notice updates to both the packaging materials inside your shipment and the exterior shipping box.

The new packout is designed to maintain required temperatures for a minimum of 48 hours during transit, providing greater shipment resilience than our previous packaging. These enhancements also support our ongoing sustainability efforts by using updated packaging materials and designs.

While the packaging may look different, there are no changes to how you receive, unpack, or handle your shipments.

Q: Why was the exterior box redesigned?

A: The exterior shipping box was redesigned as part of our transition to the new 48-hour sustainable packout.

The updated design aligns with the enhanced packaging solution and supports a more consistent customer experience. It also reflects our commitment to sustainability while maintaining the quality and reliability you expect from Cencora.

Q: Does the new exterior box affect shipment handling, security, or other processes?

A: No. The updated packaging does not require any changes to your receiving, storage, unpacking, or returns processes. You should continue to handle shipments as you do today.

Although the exterior box has a new appearance, it was designed to maintain shipment security during transit and does not affect ordering, delivery, product handling requirements, or returns eligibility.

This packaging update is intended to enhance shipment performance and sustainability while providing a seamless experience for customers.

Q: What temperature are cold chain products stored at?

A: Cold chain biologics are stored and shipped within a 2°C – 8°C; 35.6°F – 46.4°F environment.

Q: What does it mean that Cencora follows ISTA standards?

A: Cencora has qualified and validated our refrigerated packaging solutions according to the International Safe Transit Association (ISTA) standards, so that proper refrigerated product temperature is maintained while in transit to our customers. ISTA standards are designed to evaluate the effects of external temperature exposures, including heat and cold profiles developed from data gathered in real world transport, of individual packaged products shipped through a parcel delivery system. The upgraded 48-hour pack-out has been qualified against applicable ISTA 7D Winter and ISTA 7E Summer profiles to help maintain refrigerated product temperatures during transit.

For additional information please refer to <https://ista.org/docs/7Eoverview.pdf>.

To adhere to standard operating procedures, Cencora maintains continued education, training, audits, and controls at the distribution centers to monitor compliance.

Q: How long is product integrity qualified for cold chain shipments to maintain the proper refrigerated temperature?

A: All packages have been qualified to perform 48 hours in both summer and winter months when tested against industry standards ISTA 7D (cold) and ISTA 7E (hot). Please refer to the cold chain packout guide to learn more.

Q: What about weekends, how do the Friday orders that arrive Monday work?

A: Friday orders are picked and packed on Saturday, then placed back into the refrigerated, temperature-controlled environment in the distribution centers until Sunday. The carriers pick them up Sunday evening for delivery Monday.

Q: How does Cencora validate performance of its liners and packaging?

A: We partner with TemperPack to perform Operational Qualification (OQ) testing, and qualify refrigerated packaging against applicable ISTA standards, and are reviewed by the HDA. Please refer to the cold chain packout guide to learn more.

Q: With the weather varying by state, how do you determine which packout is used?

A: Summer and winter packouts are utilized based upon seasonal profiles to see that proper temperature control is maintained.

Q: How do insulated liners work to maintain product temperature?

A: Refrigerated product is properly maintained through the insulation that the recyclable ClimaCell® liner provides, coupled with the energy that is gathered and slowly released by our gel packs as the product moves through the network.

- Each liner size utilizes a specific number of gel packs, packaged in a correct manner, to see that product isn't getting too cold (commonly referred to as freeze shock) or too warm while in transit. Please refer to the cold chain packout guide to learn more.
- Additionally, we adjust the conditioning of our gel packs (frozen and refrigerated) during the year to account for the change in ambient temperature.
- During the winter months, we use frozen and refrigerated gel packs to account for the colder ambient temperature, so that the product doesn't get too cold while in transit.
- During the summer months, we use frozen gel packs to account for the higher ambient temperature, so the product remains cold while in transit.

Gel packs are conditioned in a blast freezer and during this time, they absorb the frozen temperature, which can be thought of as "energy". As time elapses while the package is on its journey, the gel packs will slowly begin to thaw, releasing the appropriate amount of "energy" into the liner needed to maintain product temperature.

Q: What are legitimate reasons to call with a concern for your product integrity?

A: Please contact support if you have concerns that the shipment may not have been packed or delivered as intended. Examples include:

- Package was not delivered within the expected delivery timing and there are concerns about extended exposure beyond validated packout duration.
- Carrier (FedEx) left the package outside or in a location that is not typical for your practice.
- Package does not appear to contain the correct number of gel packs based on the cold chain packout guide.
- Packaging appears significantly damaged or compromised.
- Product or gel packs do not feel cool to the touch, or you identify another concern that suggests a possible temperature excursion.

Q: Will the specialty network still have different packouts by location?

A: The upgraded 48-hour packout will transition through a phased rollout across our specialty network starting with Brooks, KY.

Q: What should I do if my gel packs do not arrive frozen?

A: No concerns. Gel packs may not arrive fully frozen, but the shipment is qualified to maintain the proper refrigerated temperature range when packed according to approved procedures. If the shipment otherwise appears compliant and there are no visible signs of packout issues or temperature excursion, no further action is needed.

Q: I noticed that the ClimaCell® liner was partially ripped/pierced when I received the product – should that be a concern? Will product efficacy/stability be compromised?

A: A minor rip or pierce in the ClimaCell® liner does not automatically mean product efficacy or stability has been compromised. Please review the overall condition of the shipment, including whether the packout appears consistent with approved packout images and whether there are any signs of temperature excursion or product damage. If the liner damage is significant, the packout appears noncompliant, or you have any concerns about product condition, contact your support team for review.

Q: What is the expected weight of these liners?

A: The expected packout weight varies by liner size. Current approximate weights are:

- Small: 6 pounds
- Medium: 9 pounds
- Large: 12 pounds
- Extra Large: 21 pounds

These weights reflect the enhanced cold chain packout and may vary slightly based on the final configuration and product payload.

Q: How do I dispose of the ClimaCell® liner?

A: ClimaCell® liners are designed to be curbside recyclable in many locations. Remove the liner from the box and dispose of it according to your local recycling guidelines. If recycling is not available in your area, follow your local waste disposal requirements.

Q: How does the enhanced 48-hour packout support sustainability?

A: The enhanced packout uses recyclable ClimaCell® liners and is designed to reduce overall environmental impact compared to traditional packaging options. Internal lifecycle analysis indicates a lower total carbon footprint compared to certain mail-back programs, while maintaining performance and eliminating the need for reverse logistics.

Q: How does this compare to mail-back packaging programs (other distributors)?

A: Unlike mail-back programs that require return shipping and additional handling, this packout is designed for single-use curbside recycling in many locations. This reduces transportation emissions and simplifies disposal for customers, while maintaining validated temperature performance.

Q: Why are these liners heavier?

A: We have enhanced our packout to help maintain temperature sensitive product as we ship product from our distribution centers to locations nationwide.

These packouts now have more ice packs, which in turn makes the boxes heavier.

Q: What do I need to know about returning refrigerated products with the new 48-hour packout?

A: Customers returning refrigerated products should follow the updated packing instructions provided in the returns guide. This includes using approved packaging materials, properly conditioning gel packs, following shipping requirements, and using the return label provided with the Return Authorization. Following these requirements helps support proper product handling and return credit eligibility.

Q: What steps should I follow when returning refrigerated products?

A: To support proper handling and maintain return credit eligibility:

- Verify that the lot number and NDC number on the product match the information listed on the Return Authorization.
- Use only the return label provided.
- Follow the approved refrigerated return packing instructions and use only Cencora-approved materials.
- Freeze gel packs for at least 48 hours before packing the return.
- Ship refrigerated returns Monday through Thursday using FedEx standard overnight delivery.
- Do not ship refrigerated returns on Fridays or before holidays.
- Confirm product packaging, seals, lot numbers, and expiration dates remain intact.

Q: Why is it important to follow the approved return packing instructions?

A: Refrigerated products must be packed according to approved return procedures to protect product during transit and maintain return eligibility. Returns that are not packed using Cencora-approved materials and instructions may not be eligible for credit.

Q: What are the most common reasons a refrigerated return may be delayed or become ineligible for credit?

A: Processing delays or credit eligibility issues may occur if:

- The return is shipped to a location different from the address listed on the Return Authorization.
- The wrong return label is used.
- Refrigerated returns are not shipped within the recommended Monday through Thursday shipping window.
- Required packaging materials are not used or gel packs are not properly frozen before shipment.
- Product packaging, seals, lot numbers, or expiration information are damaged or missing.

