



HOW DO I CHANGE FROM URINE TO ORAL FLUID SCREENING?

BY SHARON BOTTCHER AND KATHERINE MILLER

Oral fluid testing is permitted in nearly all 50 states and by the federal government.

Making a change can seem overwhelming at first but is often beneficial in the long run. In terms of the drug and alcohol testing industry, things have been static since nearly its inception. In 1988 the federal government enacted the Drug-Free Workplace Act, requiring federal contractors and grantees to certify that they provide a drug-free workplace. Many states followed suit, with urine testing being the only approved specimen at that time by the federal government. Recent times have brought about many changes, including the approval of oral fluid by the federal government and the proposed addition of oral fluid by the Department of Transportation (DOT). Now that oral fluid testing is permitted in nearly all 50 states and by the federal government, many employers want to either add oral fluid to their testing program or switch entirely from urine to oral fluid. This article will give an overview of best practices when switching to oral fluid.

Determine your needs

Prior to making the switch from urine to oral fluid, it's important to lay the groundwork. Look at your current drug and alcohol testing program with a critical eye and determine the issues. Is getting employees off-site for collections a difficulty? Are you concerned about your program's lack of focus on recent use rather than historic use? Make a list of pain points that you will refer to throughout the policy process. Use these pain points to determine the goals of your new program.

Next, look at your lists of pain points and goals — how does oral fluid meet or help accomplish these goals? Does oral fluid accomplish all the goals or only some? This will help you determine whether oral fluid should become your primary testing specimen, or if it should be complimentary to another specimen.

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Updating your policy

The most important thing you can do when updating your policy is to meet with a policy expert to ensure that all your bases are covered. Navigating state laws, federal regulations and case law can be extremely complex, and it's best to have an drug testing policy expert at your side to ensure you understand and address the complexities to provide yourself with legal protection.

Updating your policy can be summed up in four easy steps:

- 1. Determine which states you would like to operate in.** Are you a large, multi-state employer? A single state employer? Looking to expand into new states? Whatever your situation, the first step to updating your policy is to determine the laws, you need to comply with.
- 2. Review all applicable state laws.** Look at your state laws—are they voluntary (meaning you choose if you want to comply and receive a benefit from the state), mandatory (meaning you have to apply) or laboratory licensing laws? Are there industry specific laws that you are required to comply with based on your workplace? Is there applicable case law that you should review to ensure compliance? Do you want to comply with any additional requirements that are required to deny workers and/or unemployment compensation claims? Some states are straight forward, while some are complex with many sometimes conflicting laws employers are required to comply with. Having a good idea of what is required will let you know how much policy customization you'll need to do.
- 3. Work with an expert to create a policy.** Either reach out to an oral fluid expert, such as your OraSure sales rep. or a dedicated policy expert who is familiar with oral fluid. Work together to determine when testing will occur, where collections will take place and more. Make sure your policy covers all legal situations that are likely to arise in each state of operation and how the company will respond.
- 4. Define additional company policies.** In addition to your company policy, you need to define laboratory, Medical Review Officer (MRO) and Third-Party Administrator (TPA) policies if applicable. Having these policies and procedures ready and on hand means that you will be prepared for all situations that arise along all levels of the testing process.



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Communicate policy and program changes

Unfortunately, you're not immediately ready to go after you review and/or update your policy. The process continues as you determine who needs to be informed of policy changes, as well as what they need to know. The groups that need to be informed of policy updates/changes are your laboratory, your Medical Review Officer (MRO), your Designated Employee Representative (DER), and finally, your employees.

While it's essential to provide each of the above parties with a copy of your final updated policy, it's also a good idea to pull out pertinent information in an easy to access format so that everyone is aware of the changes implemented and how they impact their group. For example, highlight who performs collections, where they will be performed, what counts as a non-negative, specimens you will use, and more.

Once you've provided the pertinent individuals with a copy of your new policy and pulled out any relevant information for them, allow them a review period where they can read the new policy. Following the review period, meet with each group individually to answer any questions that may have come up during their policy review period. It's best practice to make sure all the details are communicated correctly prior to implementing the new program. Don't forget to post a copy of the new policy around your work sites so that it is easily and readily available to employees.

How to manage your new program

Some employers may choose to utilize a Third-Party Administrator (TPA) to manage their drug and alcohol testing program from start to finish, while others may choose to manage the program entirely on their own. It's up to each employer to determine what works best for their individual company and workplace.

For employers that choose to work with a TPA, the first step is to provide a copy of your new policy and implementation plan to the TPA. From there, it's pretty much on auto pilot for you. Your TPA should manage all day-to-day and nitty gritty aspects of the program, allowing you to focus on other aspects of your business.

Employers that choose to manage their own program have a slightly more involved process



to implement their new drug and alcohol testing program. Once your new policy is created, determine who will be performing collections. When using traditional testing methods, such as urine, the collector must go through extensive training, as well as learn how to secure a bathroom for collections if there isn't a dedicated secure facility on site or within close distance. Oral fluid collections are different. Collectors can be trained quickly and easily online or in person, making it easy to train multiple collectors so as to always have one on-site or available. It is usually considered best practice to train supervisors and/or managers to act as collectors. One advantage to oral fluid testing is that both lab-based and rapid collections can be performed on site, meaning that collectors don't have to be trained on how to prepare a dedicated collection site. Collections can occur anytime, anywhere, meaning that management by employers is streamlined and simple.

Depending on what devices and/or labs that you use, your results and reports may be provided to you in a number of different ways. If a TPA manages your program, they will manage, receive and store results on your behalf. Employers that choose to manage their own testing program will need to determine the best way to manage, receive and store their results once the new program is implemented. Confer with your testing laboratory to determine how results will be sent to you—if they're electronic, considering securely storing them in your company server as well as storing physical copies for a set amount of time. Paper results can be digitized to offer two forms of storage as well. A solution that works for one employer may not work for your workplace—find a custom solution that works for you and stick with it.

Conclusion

Making the switch to oral fluid may seem like a lot of work up front but making a change often requires effort in order to reap the benefits. Oral fluid offers many benefits to employers such as customized panels, collections anytime, anywhere, cost savings, lab-based results, and available in nearly all states and in most industries, just to mention a few. Ready to make the switch? Contact your OraSure representative today to learn more about how you can switch to oral fluid.



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