

WHAT IS ORAL FLUID TESTING?

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3 EASY STEPS TO COLLECTION



SWAB



SNAP



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Believe it or not, oral fluid testing has been around for over 20 years and is quickly becoming the methodology of choice for many employers. Oral fluid has proven to be highly accurate and the best testing methodology for many issues currently facing employers. So, what exactly is oral fluid testing and how should it be used in the workplace?

How Does Oral Fluid Testing Work?

Oral fluid testing looks at the saliva and other oral fluid secretions and is representative of what is in the bloodstream. Drugs are detectable in an individual's oral fluids within minutes of ingestion, as compared to urine, which requires several hours before certain drug metabolites are detectable. Oral fluid collections are as easy as they sound – a simple absorptive device is placed in the donor's mouth for a determined amount of time. These simple collections easily eliminate privacy concerns while still allowing observation throughout the entirety of the collection to ensure that there is no attempted adulteration. Collections only take a few minutes and then for lab based oral fluid, the samples are sent to the laboratory to undergo testing.

Testing begins with screening for a variety of drug types (depending on an employer's panel preferences and applicable state laws/federal regulations). Specimens that screen negative require no further testing. Positive specimens are tested a second time, undergoing testing via confirmation assay which looks at drug content. The entire process takes from 24-48 hours after receipt by the laboratory, after which positive results are typically sent to the Medical Review Officer (MRO).

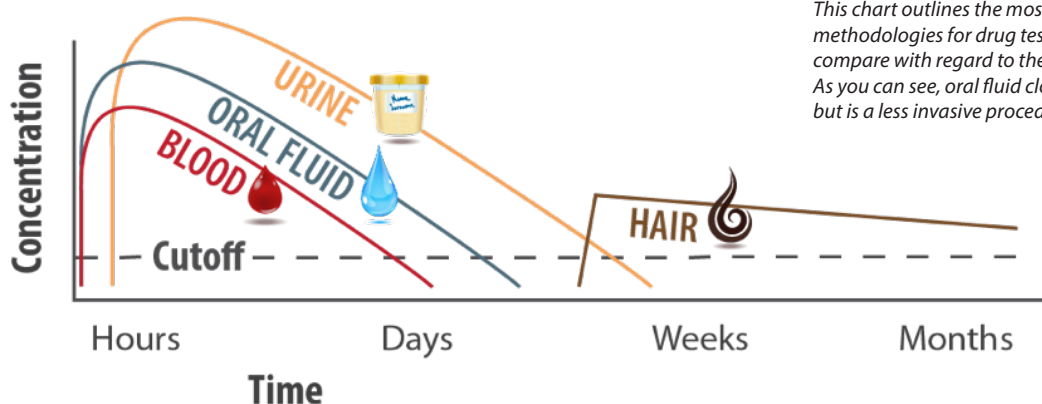
When Should I Use Oral Fluid Testing?

Because an oral fluid test looks at substances currently in the body, it is particularly useful when an employer wishes to determine recent use. Oral fluid is often used in post-accident situations to determine if drugs were in the individual's person at the time of the accident.

Another appropriate application for oral fluid drug testing would be pre-employment testing. In the job market today, there are more positions available than people to fill them, which means employers are competing for employees. One of the quickest ways to lose a potential candidate is if the hiring process takes too long. Thanks to oral fluid testing's easy collection process, the hiring process can move quickly to allow employers to hire the best candidate available to them.

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WHAT MAKES ORAL FLUID STAND OUT?



This chart outlines the most popular methodologies for drug testing and how they compare with regard to the window of detection. As you can see, oral fluid closely relates to blood, but is a less invasive procedure.

The unique advantage to oral fluid is looking at whether an employee/applicant recently used drugs, particularly when looking at marijuana use. Oral fluid is the best practice in many situations that call for the determination between recent and historic use and therefore easier to link to the possibility of impairment.

Overall, drug test positivity rates increase significantly when using oral fluid compared to urine testing. The data suggests that perhaps urine testing is not the “gold standard” anymore and employers should take notice of the positive test results that are being missed in the workplace. This could mean additional exposure for the employer and exposure often equals cost.

Next Steps for Employers

Prior to implementing an oral fluid testing program in the workplace, employers should ensure that they are permitted to use oral fluid under their state laws and/or federal regulations. Currently, 47 states permit oral fluid testing in at least one circumstance. The upcoming Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) mandatory oral fluid guidelines for federally-regulated drug-free workplaces will permit many employers in states that do not currently permit oral fluid testing to begin using this testing methodology. It is likely that the Department of Transportation (DOT) will follow SAMHSA by issuing oral fluid testing guidelines, further opening the door for traditionally safety-sensitive industries to use this testing methodology.

As the best method for detecting recent use, oral fluid is becoming more valuable in the workplace in the age of legal marijuana. With its high positivity rates, easy collections, and close relationship to blood, oral fluid provides solutions to many of the problems employers face today.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT WHETHER THE POSITIVITY RATE INCREASES OR DECREASES WHEN USING ORAL FLUID VERSUS URINE TESTING.

DRUG TEST	ANALYSIS (%)	
	URINE	ORAL FLUID
Amphetamine	0.68	0.66
Cocaine	0.31	0.73
Marijuana	0.84	8.8
Methamphetamine	—	0.43
Opiates	0.19	0.57
PCP	0.03	0.06

Source: Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index, 2017