

HOW DOES ORAL FLUID DRUG TESTING FIT INTO YOUR WORKFLOW?

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Three months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we co-sponsored a survey with the Current Consulting Group to see how the pandemic was affecting workplace drug testing. In the survey 7.6 percent of employers indicated they had recently switched to oral fluid testing and another 12 percent said they are planning to switch.¹ If the combined 19.6 percent of employers actually add or switch to oral fluid testing, it would represent a dramatic realignment of drug testing market share. And because the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), as of now, still does not permit oral fluid testing, this nearly 20 percent movement does not include any DOT-mandated tests. We also found that just over half of drug testing providers admitted that clients were experiencing trouble arranging traditional urine collections at off-site locations.

Oral fluid drug testing, which was endorsed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in October 2019, offers Third-Party Administrators (TPAs) a viable option when working with clients who are struggling to get drug tests conducted under these very challenging circumstances.

Why TPAs Offer Oral Fluid

TPAs are continually looking for ways to add value to their clients' drug testing programs and distinguish themselves from the competition. While urine testing has long been a common method of drug testing, many TPAs are discovering that oral fluid testing appeals to employers seeking to streamline the drug testing process.

Oral fluid drug testing provides employers with an important option when it comes to meeting the biggest challenges they face when trying to screen job applicants. In a recent report, HireRight identified employers' top five drug testing needs as:

1. reducing time-to-hire,
2. improving overall efficiency in the screening process,
3. verifying information,
4. getting quality information, and
5. ensuring a positive candidate experience.²

Oral fluid testing helps TPAs meet those needs for their clients. An oral fluid collection is a very non-invasive experience, which can be conducted virtually anywhere, anytime. It eliminates the need to secure a restroom, sanitize a toilet stall or send someone to an offsite facility, all of which are common practices with urine sample collections. Lab-based oral fluid testing makes it possible for TPAs to guarantee an accurate lab-based test result in the same amount of time it takes to get a urine test result.

Oral fluid testing also helps TPAs maintain control over the collection process and the overall workflow. TPAs are not required to maintain an inventory of oral fluid devices because the labs can drop ship the devices directly to the end user or the collection site. Therefore, TPAs maintain control over the device being used for collections, when and where a collection takes place, and the time that it takes to arrange and execute a sample collection. Less time spent managing collections means more time for finding new business and retaining existing business.

Most TPAs agree that they spend far too much time dealing with collector errors, adulteration issues, and redoing collections of unfit-for-testing samples. Oral fluid eliminates those issues most of the time because the collection process is relatively hassle-free, and every collection is 100 percent observed leaving virtually no opportunity for switching or adulterating a sample.

Controlling Cost to Win Business

The COVID-19 pandemic has put many drug testing companies, especially TPAs, in a precarious position. Decreased revenues from months of lockdowns and reduced business have cut deeply into clients' operating budgets. This means less money for drug testing despite a strong need to continue screening individuals for drugs, especially as millions of Americans seek work after months of unemployment. For this reason, TPAs and their customers are looking for screening options that cut the time it takes to conduct a collection, such as employee-driven collections.

We all like to see concepts explained in real numbers that we can apply to our world. TPAs often use real numbers that clearly illustrate return on investment (ROI) so clients can compare various testing methods. Demonstrating a client's real ROI from oral fluid testing requires calculating the true cost of each part of the drug test and comparing it to the equivalent cost of a urine test.

The true cost of a drug test includes hard dollars costs (fees paid for a sample collection, including the device, lab analysis, confirmation testing, and MRO verification) and indirect costs (including intangibles like time away from work for the person being tested, a supervisor or test coordinator/observer, etc.) The following chart compares hard and soft dollar costs for lab-based oral fluid and urine testing. *NOTE: this is just an illustration, your actual figures may vary.*

LAB-BASED COST FACTORS	URINE	ORAL FLUID
COLLECTION Fee end-user pays for a sample collection	\$15.00	\$0.00*
LAB ANALYSIS Fee end-user pays for lab analysis of a sample	\$18.00	\$30.00 (includes collection device)
CONFIRMATION TESTING Fee for lab to confirm a presumptive positive is typically bundled into the lab analysis fee	\$0.00	\$0.00
MRO VERIFICATION Fee for MRO services (positive & negative)	\$5.00	\$5.00
EMPLOYEE LOST-WORK TIME (worker hourly rate of \$12 x 1.5 hours for urine vs. .25 hours for oral fluid)	\$18.00	\$4.00
SUPERVISOR LOST-WORK TIME (supervisor hourly rate of \$32 x 1.5 hours for urine vs. .25 hours for oral fluid)	\$48.00	\$8.00
TRUE COST of a Urine Test vs. an Oral Fluid Test	\$104.00	\$47.00



Oral fluid testing makes it possible for TPAs to offer their clients a lab-generated result while reducing the time it takes to collect a sample. Clients see a savings in lost productivity as employees and supervisors spend less time away from work participating in the collection process. Ultimately, the true cost of an oral fluid drug test is about 54% less than the true cost of a urine test.

So that's the revenue model TPAs can use to help clients understand the value of lab-based oral fluid testing; but what about the TPA's revenue?

- First, keeping clients satisfied by meeting their needs of making drug testing more efficient and cost-effective is, in a significant way, part of the TPA's revenue.
- Second, oral fluid collections do not require a TPA to locate a suitable offsite collection facility, which oral fluid makes possible with every collection, which saves the TPA time and money.
- Third, even when a client insists that the TPA visit their worksite to conduct the oral fluid collections, the TPA still saves time and money because an oral fluid collection is much quicker and eliminates the need to secure a restroom and implement precautions to thwart cheating efforts, which are common with urine collections.

What is Causing the Increased Interest in Oral Fluid?

Bob Dylan famously sang "The times they are changing." And 2020 has made those words ring truer than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced TPAs and employers to look for more efficient, safer and more reliable ways to conduct

1. "The COVID-19 in the Workplace Survey." The Current Consulting Group, June 2020.
 2. "2019 Employment Screening Benchmark Report." HireRight, 2019.

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drug testing. In this regard, oral fluid testing has several unique advantages that make it appealing to buyers and sellers of drug testing. Following are some issues worth considering:

- **RECENT-USE DETECTION.** Drugs are detectable in an oral fluid sample within minutes after using a drug making it the only recent-use drug testing method endorsed by the federal government. This is of particular importance in states that prohibit employers from taking adverse employment action against someone who tests positive for marijuana unless the employer can show the person was impaired.
- **WINDOW OF DETECTION.** Marijuana is typically detectable in an oral fluid sample for up to 24 hours (usually less) versus several days as is the case with urine. This is helpful in states that have legalized the recreational use of marijuana and prohibit employers from discriminating against anyone for the lawful use of legal substances such as pot. Oral fluid testing makes it possible for employers to test for marijuana without peering into workers' private lives beyond several hours, but still allowing for the identification of those high-risk employees using marijuana on the job.
- **COLLECTIONS.** During the pandemic, many employers have found it challenging to arrange traditional urine collections at off-site locations. More than 50 percent of drug testing providers indicated in the COVID-19 in the workplace survey that they have clients who are having trouble arranging urine collections because offsite facilities used in the past are closed, have reduced their hours of operation or are too busy conducting COVID testing. Because oral fluid samples can be collected anywhere, anytime, arranging sample collections is easier for both the employer and the TPA.

- **FEDERAL ENDORSEMENT.** The federal government endorsed lab-based oral fluid drug testing as an accurate and legally defensible alternative to urine testing. SAMHSA's final mandatory guidelines for lab-based oral fluid drug testing (OFMG), which initially apply to federal workplaces, provide non-government employers with a gold-standard for using lab-based oral fluid testing.

Conclusion

For TPAs, as with all businesses, the bottom line is always the bottom line. In these uncertain times with substance abuse up dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, employers are looking for ways to maintain drug-free workplaces within the confines of reduced budgets and an explosive season of hiring.

Oral fluid drug testing represents an alternative testing method with an attractive option for increasing revenue for sellers and the buyers of drug testing. Collections are easy to conduct, flexible to arrange, and very difficult to cheat on. Lab-based results are accurate, legally defensible and available within the same timeframe as urine test results.

TPAs help add value to their clients' drug testing programs by offering oral fluid testing in addition to traditional testing methods. It is a proverbial "win-win" for TPAs and their customers.



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