

Impairment, when operating motor vehicles or working in safety-sensitive positions, results in an increased risk of injury or death. Alcohol and other drug use may cause or contribute to impairment. Drug testing strategies can help detect and deter substance use and make roadways and workplaces safer. Oral fluid is a practical option for detecting drug use in traffic and workplace safety programs.

Oral fluid, composed primarily of saliva, also contains other components such as cells and food residue. The terms oral fluid and saliva are often interchangeably used.

Advantages

- Can indicate recent drug use.
- Ease of collection: rapid, gender neutral, difficult to adulterate, less intrusive than blood or urine, does not require medical personnel or special facilities, practical for roadside and workplace situations.
- Scientifically proven as a reliable matrix for drug testing and legally accepted in many jurisdictions.
- Oral fluid often reflects drugs circulating in blood. It may also capture drug residue from the mouth after oral or smoked use.

Limitations

- Low sample volume.
- 10-min observed wait period with no food, drink or smoking.
- Limited scope of testing, especially for rapid, on-site tests.
- Certain drugs such as benzodiazepines partition poorly into oral fluid.
- Stimulant and/or opioid use can cause dry mouth resulting in difficulty collecting the sample.

Drug Test Interpretation

- Positive rapid oral fluid test results (e.g., roadside screening) must be confirmed.
- Confirmed positive results typically indicate recent drug use.*
- Negative results do not rule out drug use; they indicate the tested drugs were not present above the detection threshold (cut-off).
- Positive drug tests *alone* do not equate to impairment at the time of collection.
- Positive drug tests *may* indicate that the drug caused or contributed to the individual's abnormal behavior and/or impairment.
- Generally, there is no direct correlation between the oral fluid drug concentration, the amount of drug used or the concentration in blood.

**The drug detection window may be within the last few hours to a day or more depending upon several variables including the drug type, route of administration, dose, frequency of use, analytical sensitivity, and an individual's metabolism.*

Oral Fluid Suitable For:

- DUID Investigations
- Workplace testing
 - Random
 - For-cause
 - Reasonable suspicion
 - Post incident
- Treatment Monitoring
- Probation/Parole Testing

AAA Toolkit: Use of Oral Fluid to Detect Drugged Drivers



Federal Workplace Drug Testing: Oral Fluid Mandatory Guidelines

