

Bridging the gap – when a hair drug test is not enough

Marie Law, Head of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs, discusses the many benefits of oral fluid drug testing for child welfare and protection matters



Drug testing plays a crucial role in safeguarding children and informing court decisions. Whether used in private law cases—such as custody disputes—or during child protection proceedings, reliable drug testing can help establish patterns of substance use, monitor abstinence, and support safeguarding measures.

Legal professionals and social workers often rely on ‘wide-window’ (long-term) drug testing methods, such as hair and nail analysis, to assess a person’s historical drug use over several months. However, these methods cannot detect very recent consumption, which can be critical for assessing immediate risks to children.

This is where oral fluid (saliva) drug testing comes into its own.

A ‘narrow-window’ solution for real-time insight

Oral fluid (saliva) drug testing is classified as a ‘narrow-window’ (short-term) testing method, meaning it can be used to detect very recent drug use (up to 48 hours after drugs were first consumed).

During an oral fluid test, a sample of saliva is collected using an absorbent swab. The swab is then placed inside a screening device, providing results within minutes.

If drugs are detected, further analysis is carried out at our UKAS 17025-accredited laboratory to confirm the results.

The many benefits of oral fluid drug testing include:

- ▶ Quick, easy-to-use and non-invasive
- ▶ Immediate assessment—helping determine if a child is at immediate risk due to parental drug use
- ▶ Tamper-proof—directly observed sample collection makes oral fluid samples very difficult to adulterate, unlike wearable drug tests that can be removed, contaminated or damaged
- ▶ Cost-effective—no need for multiple appointments
- ▶ Wide range of substances detected
- ▶ Easy to administer with no special facilities required (unlike urine drug tests), making it ideal for home visits, unannounced checks, and emergency assessments

A comprehensive picture

While oral fluid drug testing is highly effective for detecting recent drug use, it does not provide insight into a person’s long-term substance use.

Where a holistic picture is needed, oral fluid testing therefore acts as the perfect complement to hair and/or nail drug tests.

Why is it important to combine narrow-window and wide-window drug tests?

- ▶ **Supports abstinence monitoring**—hair and nail drug testing can confirm whether an individual has been abstinent over time, while oral fluid testing can help verify recent compliance
- ▶ **Ensures a balanced assessment**—family cases benefit from immediate and historical insights, allowing for better-informed safeguarding decisions
- ▶ **Prevents misinterpretation**—a negative oral fluid test does not mean a person is drug-free; it may simply mean they have not used drugs in the past 48 hours

Why choose AlphaBiolabs?

- ▶ Rapid results from our UK laboratory
- ▶ Widest range of drugs tested
- ▶ User-friendly reports
- ▶ UKAS 17025-accredited laboratory with Lab 51 extension for toxicology samples
- ▶ Sample collections from any location within 24-48 hours of instruction
- ▶ FREE legally-instructed sample collections at our nationwide walk-in centres
- ▶ **Price Promise:** we will beat any like-for-like quote by a further 10%

Legal clients can get an AlphaBiolabs oral fluid test for half price (£49) until 30 June 2025. Simply quote OF49 when placing an order for a hair or nail drug test*

For more information, contact our New Enquiry team on 0333 600 1300 / testing@alphabiolabs.com or complete our online quote form <https://www.alphabiolabs.co.uk/legal-test-forms/>.

*Oral fluid test must be performed at the same time as hair/nail sample collection.

Marie Law, Head of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs

A highly-skilled and respected scientist with over 15 years’ experience in the field of forensics, Marie joined AlphaBiolabs in 2022 and oversees the company’s growing toxicology team.

As Head of Toxicology, Marie’s day-to-day responsibilities include maintaining the highest quality testing standards for toxicology and further enhancing AlphaBiolabs’ drug and alcohol testing services for the legal sector, members of the public, and the workplace sector.

AlphaBiolabs™