



HAIR TESTING

AN OVERVIEW

BY KYLE HICKS

Who are you and what is your role in the industry?

My name is Kyle Hicks and I am the Marketing Director for Omega Laboratories. At Omega, we specialize in laboratory-based advanced specimen testing for drugs of abuse. Our primary business centers on oral fluid and hair specimen testing, and we offer a variety of different panel options to suit the needs of various companies and organizations. I first joined the Omega team in 2011.

What sets Omega apart from other laboratories?

Omega Laboratories was the first laboratory to truly embrace the complementary nature of hair and oral fluid testing. In recognizing the unique benefits of using hair and oral fluid specimens together, Omega has been able to assist organizations in crafting well-rounded drug testing programs which capitalize on the strengths of both methodologies. The longer window of detection characteristic of hair testing, which is helpful in evaluating a donor's lifestyle for pre employment and return to duty scenarios, pairs nicely with oral fluid's shorter timeframe, which is a necessity for random and post accident testing scenarios.

What does hair and oral fluid offer over urine programs?

When people discuss their urine testing programs, my first question is always "what does urine offer you that you can't get with hair and oral fluid?" From my perspective, unless you are required to comply with certain regulations, urine testing is becoming outdated with positive rates the lowest of the 3 matrices. Oral fluid offers similar recent usage detection to urine, benefits from a faster collection time, and is always an observed collection eliminating problems of observed urine collections. Hair testing offers a longer detection window than urine, requires no special collection facilities, and is extremely effective in deterring use. Both hair and oral fluid specimens are stable, are easier to ship than urine specimens, and neither can be delayed by "shy bladder" issues. On top of all of this, both hair and oral fluid specimens are much harder to adulterate and substitute than urine specimens, making them much more difficult tests to cheat.

How do you see hair and oral fluid working in a paired drug testing program?

The flexibility offered by a paired hair and oral fluid drug testing program has many different applications in the current market. Obviously, safety sensitive industries favor programs which feature hair testing for pre-employment and return to duty, which helps to ensure that drug users do not enter their workforce. Oral fluid is then utilized for random, post-accident and for cause testing to make sure that drug use has not become a problem for those already employed by the company. In the retail and food service industries, though, the model is flipped.

Retail and food service employers prefer the speed and cost-effectiveness of oral fluid for pre-employment, random, post-accident, and for cause testing as collections can be quickly and inexpensively self-administered on site. Hair testing is often reserved for promotions to manager level positions, where an employee's actions can have larger consequences.

There is also a lot of drug testing being performed in the education sector, primarily by private schools. This is a scenario that is tailor made for oral fluid testing, as there are simply too many privacy concerns for educators to consider urine testing students. In a school setting, oral fluid simply offers more benefits and less drawbacks than urine testing.

Do you have any closing thoughts?

Simply put, if you are still using outdated urine testing methods, it's time to make the switch to a more capable program featuring hair and oral fluid.

