

# ADDING TELEHEALTH TO YOUR DRUG TESTING PROGRAM

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**W**orking remotely is, at many companies, the new normal. And it looks like it may be the permanent normal.

Flexjobs cites several surveys and studies that indicate working remotely appears to be here to stay. For example:

- 80% of company leaders plan to allow employees to “work remotely at least part of the time after the pandemic, and 47% will allow employees to work from home full-time.”
- 78% in a survey of 669 CEOs agree that “remote collaboration is here to stay for the long-term.”
- 65% of respondents in another survey report wanting to be “full-time remote employees post-pandemic, and 31% want a hybrid remote work environment.”
- 27% of workers say they are willing to take a 10% to 20% pay cut if allowed to work from home.<sup>1</sup>

## Why Telehealth Collection?

With remote working comes remote hiring. A quick search of the internet yields hundreds of websites that offer advice on how to find and land a remote job. Following the trend of remote interviews is remote drug testing, also known as telehealth collections.

A telehealth collection is typically performed in an offsite location with the donor also acting as the collector by utilizing a video app to guide them through the collection process. This makes it possible to perform a collection where it is most convenient, safe, and secure for the donor.

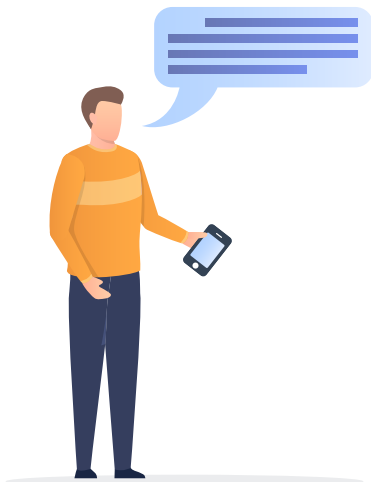
Telehealth collections typically involve a donor providing an oral fluid sample either from the workplace, a traditional collection facility or, as is most often the case, from the donor’s home.

There are several reasons why an employer would consider using telehealth collections. First and foremost, it fits well with the new-normal remote working environment brought about by the COVID-related lockdowns of 2020, that prevented many workers from returning to traditional worksites. Many employers conduct job interviews remotely and telehealth collections make it possible for them to still require job applicants to submit to a pre-employment drug test without needing an in-person observer

Telehealth collections performed at an employee’s or applicant’s home may also relieve the anxiety some people feel when required to personally go to an occupational health care facility where sick people often gather for COVID testing and treatment.

Additionally, telehealth collections are quick and cost effective. Without leaving home, a job applicant or employee can follow simple step-by-step directions provided with the telehealth collection kit to provide an oral fluid sample in minutes. The sample is sealed in a vial and, along with the appropriate paperwork, is sealed in a shipping envelope and sent to a specified laboratory. Results are available within 24-48 hours.

Of course, lab-based oral fluid testing, which was endorsed by the federal government’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in October of 2019, is the key to a successful telehealth collection program. Oral fluid and telehealth collections go hand-in-hand because of the ease of performing an oral fluid collection and the fact that each collection can be 100% observed – whether in person or remotely. There is no need to secure a private restroom, turn off hot water, put blue dye in the toilet, or any of the other precautions needed with urine testing.



Oral fluid and telehealth collections go hand-in-hand

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## How to make it work

Thanks in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth collections appear to be catching on. In a survey conducted by the Current Consulting Group toward the end of 2020, 13.9% of drug testing providers indicated that clients were showing interest in telehealth collections. If that question had been asked at the beginning of 2020, prior to the pandemic, most people would not have even been familiar with the term telehealth.

As mentioned, telehealth collections are ideal with pre-employment drug testing, but they also match up well with certain types of employee testing. For example, telehealth collections can also work well with random testing.

As with all aspects of a drug testing program, implementing a telehealth collection program must be done correctly to realize optimum success. Below are six key steps to follow when adding telehealth collections to a workplace drug testing program:

1. Decide how to perform the telehealth collection, which can be done via video platform or a dedicated app. A video platform allows a live observed collection while a dedicated collection app will walk the donor through the collection. Keep in mind that a standard video platform will not include several critical features typically only found with a dedicated collection app such as documentation of a valid or invalid collection (a feature that even brick-and-mortar collection facilities do not provide). Other features to look for include: the app's ability to capture the donor's photo ID as well as the specimen ID, customized chain-of-custody forms, audio and video evidence of the collection, and a connection with laboratories that specialize in analyzing oral fluid samples.
2. Check all applicable state and local drug testing laws, especially if you have business operations in states with a mandatory drug testing law. Because telehealth collections are relatively new to workplace drug testing, it will be virtually impossible to find a state law that specifically mentions telehealth collections. However, that does not mean

this collection method is not permitted. Collection guidelines provided by the telehealth collection app typically mirror key elements of specimen collection. If followed, these guidelines provide a certain level of legal defensibility to a drug testing program that includes telehealth collections.

3. Add a section to your drug testing policy that states the company's position on telehealth collections, including when it may be used, who it can apply to (applicants only or applicants and employees), and detailed instructions on how to participate in a telehealth collection.
4. Order a sufficient inventory of oral fluid/telehealth collection kits or ensure that your provider has a sufficient inventory available to meet your company's needs.
5. Inform employees of the company's telehealth collection policy and provide an explanation of when and how these collections will work.
6. Train supervisors and other management personnel.

## Conclusion

We have all had to adapt over the last year, as has drug testing. Telehealth collections give employers a viable option for getting drug test samples collected in today's remote working world.

As with any other aspect of drug testing, implementing your telehealth collection programs correctly is critical. As you follow the steps outlined in this article, you will increase your opportunity for a successful program.

1. "Remote Work Statistics: Navigating the New Normal." December 21, 2020. <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/remote-work-statistics/>



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