

DRUG PANELS

WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT ONE?

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Lab-based oral fluid testing offers customizable panel options for testing.

Drug testing involves some important decision-making and one impactful decision is choosing a drug panel. The term “drug panel” means a combination of drugs or category of drugs included in a drug screen test. Many drug testing methodologies, such as oral fluid, allow for customizable panels, so there is flexibility when deciding on your panel. There are many drugs that can be tested for and various considerations when choosing the panel that is right for your needs.

What drugs are included in a panel?

There are ten different drug classifications that are most common in a drug panel. Most tests do not screen for all ten, but include some combination of them according to an employer’s interests and needs. The ten common drugs for a panel are:

- Marijuana (THC)
- Cocaine
- Amphetamines
- Opioids
- Phencyclidine (PCP)
- Benzodiazepines
- Barbiturates
- Methadone
- Quaaludes
- Propoxyphene

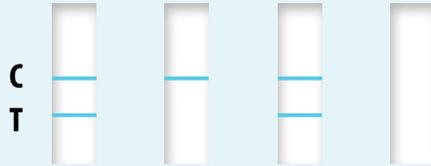
Most drugs on this list are families of drugs that will detect several different drugs within that classification depending on the sample type used. Marijuana testing, for example, will detect not just marijuana, but can also pick up THC from other cannabis products such as cannabidiol (CBD) or hashish. Amphetamines can detect methamphetamines (meth), speed and MDMA, as well as ADHD prescription drugs like Ritalin and Adderall. Opioid testing can detect multiple types of opioids including heroin, morphine, codeine, oxycodone, hydrocodone and opium. Benzodiazepine testing will detect Valium, Xanax and Ativan. Barbiturates include phenobarbital.

Customizing a panel

Not all drug panels include testing for all ten substances listed above. Common drug panels include five or seven panels. Lab-based oral fluid testing offers customizable panel options for testing. Employers can select which drugs they want to include in their panels based on their needs and circumstances.

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Panels you choose will have a major impact on the safety, security, and efficacy of your workplace.



Depending on the device, rapid testing may be less customizable than lab-based testing, but still offers some options when choosing drug panels. Rapid testing generally comes with pre-determined panels. Rapid testing is also known as instant testing and point of care or point of collection testing (POCT), and can include rapid cups and rapid oral fluid devices. The Department of Transportation (DOT) requires at least a 5-panel test to include: marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, opioids and PCP. Many state workplace drug testing laws also follow DOT's panel requirements. Examples of other panel options include a 4-panel test that removes marijuana or PCP testing, a 7-panel test that screens for various prescription drug abuses and a 10-panel test that covers most drugs of abuse. A 12-panel test is available, which can include expanded testing for additional opioids and amphetamines or can include fentanyl and ketamine.

State law requirements

Some state drug testing laws require specific drug panels to be used. Many states follow DOT's panel requirements. Others permit testing for any illegal drug or any controlled substance. Some states specify the drugs that can be included in a panel or detail restrictions on panels.

One example of a state law with drug panel specifications is Mississippi's voluntary law, found at Mississippi Administrative Code 15-16-4, Rule 53.4.1. This law permits a workplace drug test to include marijuana, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, PCP, alcohol and other controlled substances. The law does specify, however, that testing for such substances can be done only if an "appropriate federal agency" has established an approved protocol and positive threshold for each such substance. So, testing of certain substances may be limited depending on whether federal guidelines exist for that substance.

A few limited jurisdictions have begun to restrict marijuana on pre-employment drug panels. The cities of New York and Philadelphia recently enacted laws that prohibit pre-employment marijuana testing (Philadelphia's law does not take effect until 2022). Both cities include exemptions for certain job positions, including positions that require a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). New York City also includes exemptions for positions requiring employees to regularly operate heavy machinery. These laws are outliers at this point in time. Most state or local laws that limit workplace marijuana testing only restrict the adverse employment action that can be taken following a positive test but still do permit testing to occur.

How to choose a drug panel

When choosing a drug panel, there are several factors to consider.

The first and most important factor is to look at is legal requirements, which will include state and local laws, and professional requirements such as DOT or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Be sure to pay special mind to marijuana laws, workers' compensation laws and unemployment compensation laws, which are generally found separately from workplace drug testing laws. If you can, consult with an expert on drug testing laws to be sure that you understand the requirements of the states and industries in which you operate. Once you know what panels are permitted and/or required, you can begin considering the necessities of your workplace.

Secondly, consider the nature of the different job positions in your workplace. Is driving or heavy machinery involved? Are there other safety-sensitive positions? Do employees interact with clients or the public? Do employees handle sensitive data or information? How many employees are

physically present in the workplace? Answering these questions will help you assess the safety risks inherent in your workplace.

Next, consider other factors that will go into your decision. What is the culture around your workplace? What substances are being abused in your community? Are you concerned about prescription drug abuse in addition to illegal substances? Do you have concerns about productivity, absenteeism, tardiness and health care costs? Has the pandemic increased substance abuse in your workplace or your community? What level of risk are you willing to assume for employees working under the influence? Will you be using solely lab-based testing or do you utilize rapid testing as well? The answers to these questions should play a part in determining which panels are right for your workplace.

[CHECK OUT OUR STATE-BY-STATE GUIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON USING ORAL FLUID IN YOUR STATE.](#)

For limited or basic concerns about drug abuse, consider a 4- or 5-drug panel. If you have concerns about prescription drug abuse, consider a 7-drug panel. For safety-sensitive workplaces, including law enforcement, look into a 10- or 12-drug panel. And research more customizable options to include specific screening that addresses your concerns. The panels you choose will have a major impact on the safety, security and efficacy of your workplace. It is a decision that all employers would do well to study with the help of a knowledgeable professional.

