

This guide is published to educate dentists and others in the dental community on selection and reporting of salivary diagnostic sample collection and analysis.

Introduction

Saliva has emerged as a valuable biofluid for diagnostics due to its ease of collection, non-invasive nature, and its ability to detect biomarkers such as proteins, antibodies, and genetic material. Saliva diagnostics analyze oral fluids to assess a patient's condition and aid in treatment planning. As a complex biofluid containing proteins, DNA, RNA, and hormones, saliva offers a promising medium for detecting various diseases.

Salivary diagnostic tests are typically conducted in certified laboratories following [Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments \(CLIA\) standards](#). Some tests may also receive U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) clearance, indicating an evaluation of their clinical validity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, saliva-based diagnostic tests gained significant attention for detecting SARS-CoV-2, with PCR methods demonstrating sensitivity rates comparable to nasopharyngeal swabs. While saliva's potential as a diagnostic tool remains promising, further research is required to validate its use for broader health applications.

Saliva testing can also be conducted in-office or at-home for wellness purposes, though these differ from clinical diagnostics in both their application and coding requirements.

Discussion – Salivary Diagnostic Procedures and Their Codes

Salivary diagnostic procedures are categorized based on the type of test performed, the purpose of the sample collection, and the nature of the analysis. Below is a list of the relevant codes for various saliva-based diagnostic procedures, each designed for specific diagnostic or health monitoring purposes.

- **D0417 collection and preparation of saliva sample for laboratory diagnostic testing**
- **D0418 analysis of saliva sample**
Chemical or biological analysis of saliva sample for diagnostic purposes.
- **D0419 assessment of salivary flow by measurement**
This procedure is for identification of low salivary flow in patients at risk for hyposalivation and xerostomia, as well as effectiveness of pharmacological agents used to stimulate saliva production.

Each of the above codes corresponds to specific salivary diagnostic procedures and ensures proper documentation and reporting for laboratory and non-laboratory saliva tests.

Use Case Scenarios

1) Laboratory-Based Saliva Diagnostic Testing

A dental practice uses a certified laboratory to process saliva samples for the detection of biomarkers associated with periodontal disease. Patients provide samples that are carefully collected and sent to the laboratory, where advanced technologies identify relevant biomarkers. In this case, appropriate CDT codes such as D0417 for sample collection and D0418 for sample analysis should be used to document the procedures in the patient record. These codes accurately reflect the diagnostic intent.

2) In-Office or At-Home Saliva Testing for Wellness Monitoring

A dentist utilizes saliva test designed to detect biomarkers related to risk for dental caries and periodontitis. This test allows the patient to collect a saliva sample on a test card and use a mobile app to receive instant results. The test is for educational purposes and is not intended to diagnose or treat disease. Since the test is not used for clinical decision-making, the dentist should code the procedure as **D9999 unspecified adjunctive procedure, by report**, ensuring detailed documentation to describe the test.

3) Salivary Biomarker Based Products as an Adjunct to Other Procedures

A dental provider may choose to deliver additional procedures in conjunction with or based on the results of a test designed to detect risk-related biomarkers. Examples of such procedures include, but are not limited to:

- **D0425 caries susceptibility tests**
- **D0601 caries risk assessment and documentation, with a finding of low risk**
- **D0602 caries risk assessment and documentation, with a finding of moderate risk**
- **D0603 caries risk assessment and documentation, with a finding of high risk**
- **D1330 oral hygiene instructions**

These examples are illustrative and not intended to represent a comprehensive list of all possible procedures. The treating dentist, using their clinical training and experience, determines the appropriate services to deliver. At the time of delivery, the dentist selects the most appropriate code to document the procedure performed, referring to the full CDT Code entry to ensure accurate, comprehensive documentation.

Summary

Saliva-based diagnostic testing is an evolving area of clinical practice, offering non-invasive alternatives for detecting oral and systemic health biomarkers. Understanding the distinction between diagnostic tests and wellness-focused saliva tests is important for proper coding. As saliva-based diagnostics continue to evolve, dental professionals should stay informed about appropriate procedural coding to ensure accurate documentation and reporting.

Questions or Assistance?

Call 800-621-8099 or send an email to dentalcode@ada.org

Notes:

- This document includes content from the ADA publication – *Current Dental Terminology (CDT)* ©2024.
- The *Code on Dental Procedures and Nomenclature* (CDT Code) provides dentists a means to document services delivered, not specific products that may be used during the course of delivering the service.