

This guide is published to educate dentists and others in the dental community on selection and reporting of salivary 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 can be used to 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 tests are typically conducted in certified laboratories following [Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments \(CLIA\) standards](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, saliva-based 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 in clinical applications and coding requirements.

Discussion – Saliva Based Procedures and Their Codes

Saliva based 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 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.
- **D0422 collection and preparation of genetic sample material for laboratory analysis and report**
- **D0423 genetic test for susceptibility to diseases – specimen analysis**

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

Use Case Scenarios

1) Laboratory-Based Saliva 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 Saliva Testing for Wellness Monitoring

When a saliva test designed to detect biomarkers is used for wellness monitoring, the test is for educational purposes and is not intended to diagnose disease. Since the test is not used for clinical decision-making, the procedure should be coded as **D9999 unspecified adjunctive procedure, by report**, ensuring detailed documentation to describe the test.

3) In-Office Salivary Biomarker Based Testing as an Adjunct for Risk Assessment

A dentist may collect and analyze a saliva sample chairside to detect biomarkers to determine risk for disease. When such tests are used as adjuncts for caries risk assessment then they may be coded as follows:

- **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**

These examples are illustrative and do not represent a comprehensive list of all possible procedures.

For other risk determinations, such as periodontal or cancer risk assessment, collection and analysis of saliva samples may be coded as **D9999 unspecified adjunctive procedure, by report**. When the dentist believes that they are collecting and analyzing a saliva sample chairside for diagnostic purposes, then the appropriate code is **D0418 analysis of a saliva sample**.

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 tests for diagnostic purposes and wellness-focused saliva tests is important for proper coding. As saliva-based testing continues to evolve, dental professionals should stay informed about appropriate procedural coding to ensure accurate documentation and reporting.

CDT codes enable every dentist to accurately document services delivered in a patient's dental record and reported on a claim. As written in the CDT manual's Preface, the presence of a CDT code does not mean that the procedure is covered or reimbursed by a dental benefit plan. Reimbursements for any procedure is determined by the dental benefit plans. Any questions about reimbursements are best addressed by contacting the particular insurance company involved.

For more information on the clinical applications of salivary testing, please refer to the following ADA Oral Health Topics Resource: [Salivary Diagnostics | American Dental Association \(ada.org\)](https://www.ada.org/en/dentistry-101/oral-health-topics/salivary-diagnostics).

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.