

INDUSTRY GUIDE

# work place drug testing

THE BENEFITS OF USING NATA ACCREDITED FACILITY



**Accreditation  
Matters**



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## INDUSTRY GUIDE

# work place drug testing



## Background

It is a fact of life that in many workplaces drug testing may have to be undertaken. This may include pre-employment, random screening and “for cause” testing.

So, if you are involved in workplace drug testing, either as a regulator, specifier, employer or employee, there is only one thing that really counts – a correct answer.

A test result saying a person does not have drugs in their system when they really do – a false negative – may lead to serious outcomes for the individual and all those around him or her.

**But a false positive result may also have serious consequences –**

- for a worker, being unfairly penalised and/or stigmatised;
- for the employer, having to shut down or delay work causing inconvenience to many and loss of productivity.

So it’s important everyone needs to have confidence in workplace drug testing services and know that they are competent to deliver the correct answers.

# what criteria are used in the testing?



In workplace drug testing International Standards ISO/IEC 17025 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories or ISO 15189 Medical Laboratories - Requirements for Quality and Competence, provide the framework for ensuring reliability, competence, integrity and overall quality of a facilities processes.

These International Standards are usually supplemented by local Australian/ New Zealand procedural standards used as the basis for workplace testing:

- AS/NZS 4308:2008 procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs of abuse in urine
- This is being superseded by AS/NZS 4308:2023 Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantification of drugs in urine
- AS/NZS 4760:2019 procedure for specimen collection and the detection quantification of drugs in oral fluid

# what is actually covered in the drug testing?



The steps in a  
drug testing  
process are:



1

sample  
collection



2

screening  
tests



3

confirmatory  
testing

The reliability of the result may be compromised by any of these steps if not being performed properly. For example, a well performed test will never compensate for a poorly acquired or badly managed sample.

# where does NATA fit in?



NATA accreditation is a means of providing everyone with confidence in the competence of drug testing services through its third-party, peer assessment processes.

NATA currently offers accreditation under AS/NZS 4760:2019 dealing with oral fluid testing for the following:

**Section 2** - Collection, storage, handling and dispatch

**Section 3** - General laboratory requirements

**Section 4** - Laboratory screen testing

**Section 5** - Laboratory confirmatory procedures

**Appendix A** - On-site screening test procedure and

**Appendix B** - Additional testing

NATA currently offers accreditation under AS/NZS 4308 dealing with urine testing for the following:

**Section 2** - Collection, storage, handling and dispatch

**Section 3** - Onsite screening test procedure

**Section 4** - General laboratory requirements

**Section 5** - Laboratory screening procedures and

**Section 6** - Laboratory confirmatory procedures

# where can it go wrong?



Samples need to be taken at the right time and placed in appropriate containers that will not result in contamination or sample degradation.

They need to be correctly labelled with all the relevant information. If samples are to be stored for any time, or transported for testing, they need to be kept in appropriate conditions and with adequate security.

Extended delays may compromise the sample and, hence, the test result.

Screening tests performed using test kits may be relatively simple to undertake but still need to be appropriately verified against specified criteria, performed by competent personnel in an environment that will not cause contamination.

The kits themselves can be compromised if they are not kept at the correct temperature including when they are transported, since screening tests are not usually performed in an air-conditioned laboratory. This also means that personnel need to undertake periodic checks on the kits - called quality control or QC - to ensure they are working as expected.

So it is clear that all of the processes in a laboratory - from sample receipt and registration through to the issuing of a test report - have to be managed competently and be under complete control.

In short, a failure to perform correctly any of these steps in the process has the potential to deliver incorrect results, resulting in incorrect decision making.

In safety sensitive activities such as transport, aviation, mining industries etc., this is clearly a critical issue.

# why NATA?



For employers operating their workplace drug and alcohol management plans, NATA accreditation provides confidence in the integrity of a testing system.

For those that may be the subject of drug testing, NATA accreditation is a means of having confidence that your sample will be obtained, transported, stored and tested by a service that has the competence and capability to deliver a reliable result.

For government agencies and regulators, NATA accreditation facilitates the policy objective of providing a safe industry.

**The key to confidence in any test result must lie in the collective competence of all those involved in:**

- ✓ managing the collection of the sample
- ✓ transporting the sample securely under appropriate conditions
- ✓ undertaking the testing
- ✓ reporting the result

It is in the practical demonstration of this competence where NATA accreditation proves its value.

# what is NATA accreditation?



NATA has been assessing the competence of testing services for nearly 80-years. It delivers confidence in testing services provided to industry, business and the public.

NATA has also accredited drug testing facilities against the Australian standards for many decades. Laboratory drug testing accreditation began when AS 4308 was first published in the 1990s and onsite screening accreditation began with the publication of AS/NZS 4308:2008.

NATA accreditation is for specific activities and tests. It is not a blanket “tick” for everything a facility does. So those using the accredited drug testing service can be assured that an assessment team has looked specifically at all facets of the drug testing activities in detail and not just some generic aspects of laboratory practice.

# what are the requirements for accreditation



There are two levels of published standards that are applied at a NATA assessment.

Firstly, there are the standards that describe sound laboratory practices; that is, the need to have things such as



competent and trained staff



appropriate equipment and instruments



proper management and storage of test kits and reagents



secure and controlled storage and management of samples



comprehensive record keeping



clear and precise reporting

These things, and much more, are described in international standards used in accreditation around the world. In this case ISO/IEC 17025 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories or ISO 15189 Medical Laboratories - Requirements for Quality and Competence.

The second level of standards used in NATA assessments describe the specific procedural requirements for the sampling and testing being accredited. In workplace drug testing, the standards are AS/NZS 4308 (urine) and AS/NZS 4760 (oral fluid).

It is important to note that NATA does not write standards used in accreditation as it would be a conflict of interest.

It is a convention in national and international standards writing bodies that standards should:

- meet the needs of as many stakeholders as possible
- state the minimum requirements needed to comply with what the standard is trying to achieve, not something gold plated.

# who can be accredited?



NATA accreditation is available to any third-party, second-party and in-house service providers that are competent and capable of delivering reliable test results. For larger organisations, the costs of engaging third-party providers may make the in-house option more cost effective.

In-house and second party providers are, of course, required to demonstrate management and operational separation from the areas where personnel are subject to drug and alcohol testing.

# practical tips



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## Looking for a NATA accredited laboratory

Employers seeking a service provider can start with the search engine on the NATA website [www.nata.com.au](http://www.nata.com.au). Each service provider will have a “[scope of accreditation](#)” which will contain a specific reference to AS/NZS 4308 and/or AS 4760 together with the particular parts covered by the accreditation - sampling, screening and/or laboratory testing.

Employees that find themselves the subject of a drug test should seek to have all steps in the process undertaken by accredited facilities. They should also check the accreditation status of the provider on the NATA website.

Alternatively, NATA may be contacted directly for advice on which facilities have accreditation and for what. **(Contact details are provided on the back page.)**

## What to ask for from the service provider

The best way of making sure that you get what you need from a NATA accredited service provider is to ask that the results be provided on a “NATA endorsed report”.

This will have the NATA logo and statement of the accreditation held and provide the end user with assurance that the testing has been performed in accordance with the NATA accreditation requirements.

If a facility is accredited, yet they state that they cannot provide an endorsed report, there may be an issue so it is advisable to contact NATA.



## Turn-around-times

Employers do not want to have staff and equipment assets sitting around doing nothing. Employees don't want to be in limbo waiting for a test result. So when ordering services, make sure your provider knows your deadlines and seek their assurance that they will provide acceptable turn-around-times.

## Reality check

NATA accreditation offers confidence but it is still advisable for service users to do their own checks.

- ✓ Verify that information such as date of test, location, sample ID and NATA-endorsement are all included in the test report.
- ✓ Depending on budget, consider having a laboratory test (confirmation) on a negative screening result every now and then or have two laboratories do the confirmation test.
- ✓ Check the service provider's accreditation every few months as they come and go out of the NATA system and scopes of accreditation change.

## If in doubt, seek advice from NATA

Problems with service providers should be sorted directly if possible. But if you feel an accredited facility is not doing what you have asked of them, or you have evidence of incorrect results, contact NATA. Depending on the nature of the issue, NATA may provide some practical advice or, if it constitutes a complaint, investigate the matter with the accredited facility.

# more about NATA?



people who have specific understanding and technical expertise of the activities performed by the laboratory or inspection body – supported by NATA's staff of lead assessors.

NATA regularly engages with its stakeholders to ensure that accreditation processes are relevant and the level of rigour in the peer assessment is fit-for-purpose – delivering the required level of confidence in the right aspects of the work at a cost that is manageable for the accredited facilities and their clients.

NATA is a Government-endorsed, independent, not-for-profit company operating as an association owned by its members.

## further assistance

Please contact NATA  
at [corpcomm@nata.com.au](mailto:corpcomm@nata.com.au)  
or on 1 800 621 666



Established in 1947, NATA was the world's first comprehensive laboratory accreditation body and continues as one of the largest. NATA's authority stems from its nearly 80+ years of accreditation history and formal recognition by the Australian Government through a Memorandum of Understanding.

The core of NATA accreditation is the third party, objective, peer review process at a scientific/technical level that provides confidence that the accredited facility has the competence and capability to produce reliable outputs.

NATA's ability to provide confidence in the technical competence and capability of a broad range of measurement, testing and inspection activities is achieved through the services provided by over three thousand voluntary peer assessors –