

Alcohol testing & the family court: what you need to know

Marie Law, Head of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs, discusses the crucial role of alcohol testing, the variety of testing methods available, and the tests that are best suited to your particular case

Alcohol testing plays a crucial role in UK courts, providing an essential part of the evidential picture when it comes to identifying chronic and excessive alcohol consumption or proof of abstinence.

This is especially important where the safeguarding of children is paramount, enabling authorities to act on urgent welfare needs, or allowing families to remain together where no risk is evident.

For alcohol testing, highly experienced toxicologists analyse biological samples (blood, hair, nails) for the presence of alcohol biomarkers—byproducts of alcohol created when ethanol is processed by the body.

The results are analysed in accordance with internationally established cut-off levels to determine whether the person has been drinking alcohol to a chronic and excessive level, whether their drinking has been within more moderate parameters, or whether they are abstinent.

For blood alcohol testing, Phosphatidylethanol (PEth) testing is the gold standard. Unlike CDT, LFT and MCV blood tests, PEth is a direct biomarker of alcohol. This means that it is only present in the body when alcohol has been consumed.

For hair alcohol testing, toxicologists test for the presence of the direct biomarkers Ethyl Glucuronide (EtG) and Ethyl Palmitate (EtPa/FAEE). Each of these markers is absorbed into the hair via different routes and can be used to assess excessive alcohol use.

Nail alcohol tests work by analysing fingernail or toenail clippings for the presence of EtG. This is ideal where hair testing is not possible, such as where the donor has little or no hair, or for religious reasons.

Blood, hair, and nail alcohol tests are all 'wide window' forms of testing, meaning they can be used to gain insight into historic alcohol consumption over several weeks or months.



Other alcohol tests, such as breath tests or SCRAM Continuous Alcohol Monitoring® (using an ankle monitor), provide real-time, 'here and now' results.

Which test is best?

The type of alcohol test you need depends on the needs of your case, what type and period of analysis you require, and the sample type available.

For example, where a **history of consumption** needs to be assessed, blood, hair and nail alcohol tests provide insight into drinking behaviours over a defined period:

- ▶ **PEth blood alcohol testing**
 - ▶ Detects excessive drinking (even following a single drinking episode), monitors abstinence, drinking behaviour, identifies relapse, and verifies changed patterns of alcohol consumption
 - ▶ For a period of up to 4 weeks
 - ▶ We can also provide repeat PEth testing over several months for ongoing monitoring, if required
- ▶ **Head hair**
 - ▶ Test for both chronic & excessive consumption, as well as abstinence
 - ▶ For a period spanning from one month to 6 months

- ▶ **Body hair**
 - ▶ Test for both chronic & excessive consumption, as well as abstinence
 - ▶ For a period of up to 12 months
- ▶ **Nail clippings**
 - ▶ Test for both chronic & excessive consumption, as well as abstinence
 - ▶ For a period of up to 6 months (fingernails) or 12 months (toenails)

Where **real-time results** are needed, **breath testing** and **SCRAM CAM®** can be used to demonstrate that an individual has committed to reducing their alcohol intake, or show that alcohol consumption has occurred within the days/hours prior to important welfare decisions being made.

Both wide-window tests and those offering real-time results can be used together to gain a thorough and accurate assessment of a person's drinking patterns over time.

Alcohol testing you can trust

We have over 20 years' experience providing court-admissible alcohol testing direct from our UKAS-accredited laboratory.

Our in-house toxicologists analyse blood, hair, and nail samples at our state-of-the-art UK laboratory for the presence of alcohol biomarkers. Breath alcohol testing and SCRAM CAM® are also available.

Our nationwide network of professional sample collectors are trained to collect samples under chain of custody, and our test results are accepted by Family Courts and the Ministry of Justice.

As well as collecting samples from your location of choice, we also offer **FREE** sample collection for legally-instructed alcohol tests from our 20 walk-in centres across the UK and Ireland—a service unique to AlphaBiolabs.

Legal clients can also claim 15% off alcohol testing with AlphaBiolabs until 31 October 2024. Simply quote ALC15 when placing an order.

To request a quote complete our online form, call our New Enquiry team on 0333 600 1300, or email testing@alphabiolabs.com and a member of the team will be happy to discuss your requirements.

Marie Law, Head of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs, highly-skilled and respected scientist with over 15 years' experience in the field of forensics, Marie joined AlphaBiolabs in 2022 and oversees the company's growing toxicology team.



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