

FDA authorizes COVID-19 saliva test trialed in the NBA bubble

The Food and Drug Administration authorized a saliva-based COVID-19 test that the National Basketball Association helped study. The testing method, called SalivaDirect, is cheap and could be run by most labs.

Labs could charge as little as \$10 per sample to run the test, said Nathan Grubaugh, an assistant professor at the Yale School of Public Health and one head of the team developing the test, in a press release.

This is the fifth saliva-based testing method authorized by the FDA. People can collect a saliva sample themselves by spitting into a tube, rather than have a healthcare provider insert a swab deep into their nasal cavity. Many labs have struggled to get enough swabs for COVID-19 tests, and using saliva sidesteps that bottleneck. The SalivaDirect test also does not use an extra step to pull the coronavirus genetic material out of the saliva sample, so labs don't need specialized extraction kits – which have also been in short supply. That makes the test slightly less sensitive than other tests, but faster and cheaper.

“The SalivaDirect test for rapid detection of SARS-CoV-2 is yet another testing innovation game changer that will reduce the demand for scarce testing resources,” said Brett Giroir, COVID-19 Testing Coordinator, in a press release.

The SalivaDirect research was funded in part by the NBA, which also helped the Yale team validate the testing method. The

league is playing out the 2020 season inside a “bubble” at Disney World, and the NBA players there are tested for COVID-19 nearly every day. Players had the option of giving a saliva sample for SalivaDirect along with their swab test. The researchers then compared the two types of tests to make sure the saliva was just as accurate.

The NBA offered a ready-made group of people to study the method in. “What just made this really possible was that they already had staff out there collecting samples,” Anne Wylie, the other project head, told *The Verge* in July.

The Yale team plans to make the testing method available to any lab that wants to use it.

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/8/15/21370153/covid-saliva-test-authorization-fda-nba-yale>