



Screening for Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCA)

A qualitative drug screen is used to detect the presence of a drug in the body. Saliva or urine are most commonly tested via oral swab or urine drug screening, respectively. Detection of a drug or its metabolite(s) in urine or saliva is evidence of prior use. It does not, by itself, indicate that the drug remains in the blood.

Among compounds often included in routine drug screening are tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs). While reports of TCA misuse are not unheard of, the public health significance and implication on treatment planning is not well validated.¹ As such, screening for tricyclic antidepressants should not be included in routine urine drug screening, and medical necessity criteria must be satisfied prior to coverage of urine testing for these compounds.

CBH will cover medically necessary qualitative drug screens as follows:

1. Member presents with clinical signs/symptoms that suggest abuse/aberrant use of tricyclic antidepressants AND the provider can document the specific treatment plan changes that will be made as a result of a potentially positive screening test.
2. Oral or urine testing will not be covered when blood testing for tricyclics is performed simultaneously.

Note: for purposes of assessing adherence to TCA's, adequate dosing, and toxicity risk (combined with electrocardiography), plasma TCA levels are superior; oral swab or urine testing should not be used for these indications.

¹ Evans, E. and Sullivan, M. Abuse and misuse of antidepressants. *Subst Abuse Rehabil.* 2014; 5: 107–120. Published online 2014 Aug 14. doi: 10.2147/SAR.S37917