

What Parents Want to Know About Drug Testing

A special reproducible handout.

Parents who consider drug testing their children usually have lots of questions about the test, the results and how to approach it with their kids. This Q & A, developed by student and employee assistance specialists Cathy Cratty and Amy Byrne of Township High School District 113 in Highland Park, Ill., can be reproduced and handed out to parents to help give them the information they need and want. You may use it as it is or alter the text to accommodate local information. We only ask that you include the credit blurb on page 19 even if you make changes to the document.

Drug Testing Questions and Answers for Parents

Q What substances will a drug screen detect?

A The number and types of drugs that are tested for vary. Be sure to ask what drugs are included in the test. Due to a federal government requirement for the testing of commercial class drivers, most drug testing companies offer a drug test which checks for substances in the following categories:

Drug Testing

Questions and Answers

for Parents

If you suspect that your child is using alcohol or other drugs, you probably have considered drug testing. This question and answer guide to the drug screening process was developed by student assistance specialists at Township High School District 113 in Highland Park, Ill. For more information and help in locating local resources, contact your school's student assistance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse or guidance counselor. And hang on tightly to your resolve to help your child stay drug-free and healthy.

By Cathy Cratty and Amy Byrne

Q What is drug testing?

A Drug testing is a medical means to test for various drugs in the body.

Q How is drug testing completed?

A There are three primary types of drug tests: blood, urine and hair.

Blood tests

- Are the most expensive.
- Are the most accurate method of testing.
- Are the least common.
- Will determine if the person is under the influence at the time of testing.

Urine tests

- Are the least expensive (approx. \$25-\$60).
- Are less intrusive than a blood test.
- Can be tampered with to skew the results.

Hair tests (hair must be at least 1.5 inches long)

- Are more expensive than urine tests (approx. \$100-\$200).
- Are considered the least intrusive.
- Detect substance use for the past 90 days.

Q What substances will a drug screen detect?

A The number and types of drugs that are tested for vary. Be sure to ask what drugs are included in the test. Due to a federal government requirement for the testing of commercial class drivers, most drug testing companies offer a basic drug test that checks for substances in the following five categories:

1. Cannabinoids (marijuana, hash)
2. Cocaine (crack, benzoylecognine)
3. Amphetamines (methamphetamines)
4. Opiates (heroin, opium, codeine, morphine, Vicodin®, Oxycontin®, Percocet®, Darvon®, Demerol®).
5. Phencyclidine (PCP)

Most drug testing companies also offer an expanded test that includes a few additional drugs in the process. In general, they do not add all of the additional substances in their expanded test, but choose a different combination of three or four of the following:

1. Barbiturates (phenobarbital, secobarbital/Seconal®)
2. Benzodiazepines (Klonopin®, Ativan®, Xanax®, Valium®, Librium®)
3. Methadone
4. Ethanol (alcohol)

In addition, a few other substances can be tested for, but the procedure is difficult due to light sensitivity of the substances. You must ask specifically for the following to be tested:

1. Ecstasy (MDMA, MDA, MDE)
2. Hallucinogens (LSD, psilocybin, mushrooms, mescaline)
3. Inhalants (toluene, xylene, benzene)

Q How long can different drugs be detected in the system?

A All detection times are approximate, depending on how much was used, how recently used, how often used, the potency of the drug, the individual's metabolism and fluid intake.

Urinalysis drug screening:

Alcohol	6-24 hours	Marijuana.....	1-30 days
Ecstasy	8-12 hours	Cocaine	1-4 days
LSD	1-4 days	Barbiturates	1-21 days
Benzodiazepines	1-42 days	Phencyclidine.....	1-14 days
Heroin/opiates	1-3 days	Amphetamines	1-4 days

Hair analysis:

Approximate detection times depend on the length of the hair sample. Each half inch represents approximately 30 days. Drugs used in the last two weeks cannot be detected. The same drugs listed above may be tested.

Q Are all drug screen results the same?

A No. Some tests will provide more specific results than others. (See “Questions to ask before choosing” on this page.)

Q Should I tell my children that they will be tested?

A Telling your children that you will drug screen them is important in letting them know that you will do all that you can to ensure their health and safety. However, it is best not to let them know when the screening will occur, so there is less chance of tampering with the sample.

Q Can drug screens be adulterated?

A Yes, there are ways to produce a “false negative” or otherwise interfere with the test results:

- Products are available that guarantee negative drug screen results. These products are available in health food stores, over the Internet and in magazines, such as *High Times*, that focus on drugs.
- Flushing the system with large amounts of water.
- Household products such as Vanish crystals, Visine or bleach can be dropped into the urine sample.
- Someone else’s urine or animal urine can be substituted if the collection of the sample is not observed.

Q How will I know if the result is a “false negative”?

A Ask the following questions before choosing where you will take your teen for a drug screen:

- Will someone observe the sample being given?
- Are the facilities secure so that no access to water or other materials is possible?
- Is the sample temperature tested? (Urine samples should be within one or two degrees of normal body temperature (98.6(d)F)
- How does the facility test for validity?
- Does the facility check creatinine (a protein produced by muscles and released into the blood) levels?
- Will the facility notify you if the creatinine levels are not in the normal range (which can suggest that the system was flushed or the sample was tampered with)?
- Are the results quantitative or qualitative?
Quantitative — Provides an amount of drug in the urine.
Qualitative — Provides only a positive or negative result with no indication of the amount of drug in the urine.
- Will I be made aware of the amount of drug in the urine, even if it is below the established threshold?

Q Where would I take my teen for a drug screen?

A Drug testing can be a part of a drug and alcohol assessment that includes an interview by a professional counselor with the child and parent. A list of local agencies that offer assessments is attached. In addition:

- Physicians can provide drug screening.
- Some drug and alcohol treatment centers can provide testing without a doctor's order.
- Home tests can work if directions are closely followed, your child is observed while the sample is taken and s/he is not aware ahead of time that the sample will be taken. *Note: Home tests that offer immediate results are for initial screening and will need to be processed further in a laboratory.*

REMEMBER!

- Do not assume that a negative drug screen guarantees that your child is not involved in drugs. Pay attention to the whole picture, talk to your child's friends and their parents, as well as school personnel.
- Drug testing is one part of determining if your child is using alcohol and/or other drugs.
- Changes in behavior, attitudes and friends are key indicators as well.
- Asking questions discussed on this sheet can help you maximize the information obtained from the screening.

Other questions? Feel free to contact:

[Fill in your contact information here.]

References

Falkowski, C. (2000). *Dangerous Drugs: An Easy-to-use Reference for Parents and Professionals*. Hazelden: Minnesota.

Northern Illinois Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (NICASA), 1113 Greenwood Ave., Waukegan, IL.

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