

# Home Drug Testing: What Parents Need to Know

If you think your teen is using drugs, you may have thought about using a home drug test. While this might seem like a simple and quick way to get an answer, drug tests are not always reliable, and your teen may resent being tested.

Remember that your teen's doctor can help assess whether your teen has a drug problem, so a lab test is not always needed. However, if a drug test is recommended, your teen should know about it. The American Academy of Pediatrics opposes drug tests without a teen's knowledge and consent. Also, in many states, teens can choose whether to share results with their parents.

## Types of Drug Testing

Drug tests most commonly test urine. A Breathalyzer may be used to test for alcohol use. However, it will not detect other substances. Also, many body tissues and fluids can be tested for drug use, like hair, saliva, nails, and sweat. Some of these alternatives show promise but need to be refined. For instance, hair tests do not detect recent drug use. Hair color and type or secondhand marijuana smoke may also skew hair test results.

## Limits of Urine Drug Testing

A chemical analysis of urine, or urinalysis, is the most common drug test. But the test has limits and should be confirmed by more specific tests. Here are pitfalls parents should consider.

- The test may not detect all illicit drugs. Most routine urine tests do not catch LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), ketamine, ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), inhalant, or anabolic steroid use. Use of these substances is very uncommon, but parents should be aware of this limitation. They also may not detect alcohol, the substance teens are most likely to use.
- Test results may be false negatives. Most drugs are detectable for only a short time after they are used and can be flushed from the person's system in as few as 12 hours. Within 2 or 3 days, many of these drugs are undetectable. One exception is marijuana. Teens who have been using heavily (daily or nearly daily) can have a positive test result for 2 to 3 weeks or longer (up to 6 weeks in some reports) after quitting.
- Test results may be false positives. For instance, routine urine test results may show marijuana use days—or even weeks—after your teen has quit using the drug. Also, sinus or allergy medicines and poppy seeds (from poppy seed bagels or muffins) may affect test results. On rare occasions, antibiotics may affect test results.

## When Drug Testing May Be Required

The court system or your teen's school may require a drug test. While still a controversial policy, many schools screen young athletes for drug use. Some private schools test all their students. Urine tests also may help teens who are receiving drug treatment to stay away from drugs.

If drug testing is requested, you and your teen's doctor should work together with the school to make a reasonable plan for your teen.

## How Your Teen's Doctor Can Help

Your teen's doctor may be able to identify drug use by asking you and your teen questions. However, the doctor will likely want to speak with each of you privately. Although you may want to be with your

teen, let the doctor talk with your teen alone and in strict confidence. Keep in mind that your teen's doctor will tell you if your teen is at immediate risk of being harmed or causing harm.

If a drug test is recommended or required,

- You and your teen's doctor can work together to ensure you get reliable lab results.
- Make sure your teen's sample is carefully collected and handled by an experienced, certified lab.
- Guard against human error.
- Remember that a lab test is just one measure of drug use. Your teen's doctor will also consider your teen's behavior, report, and physical exam, as well as your report, so test results can be interpreted in context.
- You may need to use consequences like suspending driving privileges or grounding, if your teen refuses a recommended test.

## Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) and [www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org)

National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## Remember

Teen drug use is a serious problem. You do not have to handle it alone. Treatment works. Do not be afraid to seek professional help from your teen's doctor or a counselor, support group, or treatment program. They can help you provide the support that is so crucial to the success of any treatment program.

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