

DRUG TESTING

Substance abuse in Antigua and Barbuda should be recognized for what it is a major mental health issue and dealt with accordingly. Like vision and hearing tests, drug testing can alert necessary entities to potential problems that continued drug use might cause, such as liver or lung damage, mental health diseases, memory impairment, addiction, overdose, even death. Once the drug problem has been identified and the person is ready to get help, intervention and then treatment, if appropriate, can begin.

There are various ways of measuring the use of drugs. Drug testing is a necessarily tool in determining employment eligibility and the integrity or a person. Listed below are various ways of drug testing.

Pros and Cons of the Various Drug Testing Methods

Methods	Pros	Cons
Urine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highest assurance of reliable results.• Least expensive.• Most flexibility in testing different drugs, including alcohol and nicotine.• Most likely of all drug-testing methods to withstand legal challenge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specimen can be adulterated, substituted, or diluted.• Limited window of detection.• Test sometimes viewed as invasive or embarrassing.• Biological hazard for specimen handling and shipping to lab.
Hair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Longer window of detection.• Greater stability (does not deteriorate).• Can measure chronic drug use.• Convenient shipping and storage (no need to refrigerate).• Collection procedure not considered invasive or embarrassing.• More difficult to adulterate than urine.• Detects alcohol/cocaine combination use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More expensive.• Test usually limited to basic 5-drug panel.• Cannot detect alcohol use.• Will not detect very recent drug use (1 to 7 days prior to test).
Oral Fluids	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sample obtained under direct observation.• Minimal risk of tampering.• Non-invasive.• Samples can be collected easily in virtually any environment.• Can detect alcohol use.• Reflects recent drug use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drugs and drug metabolites do not remain in oral fluids as long as they do in urine.• Less efficient than other testing methods in detecting marijuana use.
Sweat Patch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-invasive.• Variable removal date (generally 1 to 7 days).• Quick application and removal.• Longer window of detection than urine.• No sample substitution possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited number of labs able to process results.• People with skin eruptions, excessive hair, or cuts and abrasions cannot wear the patch.• Passive exposure to drugs may contaminate patch and affect results.

What Does Each Test Measure?

Drug tests are used to determine whether a person has used alcohol or illegal drugs. Some tests show recent use only, while others indicate use over a longer period. Each type of test has different applications and is used to detect a specific drug or group of drugs.

Following are summaries of the most commonly used tests:

Urine

Results of a urine test show the presence or absence of specific drugs or drug metabolites in the urine. Metabolites are drug residues that remain in the system for some time after the effects of the drug have worn off. A positive urine test does not necessarily mean the subject was under the influence of drugs at the time of the test. Rather, it detects and measures use of a particular drug within the previous few days.

Hair

Analysis of hair may provide a much longer “testing window” for the presence of drugs and drug metabolites, giving a more complete drug-use history that goes back as far as 90 days. Like urine testing, hair testing does not provide evidence of current impairment, only past use of.

Sweat Patch

Another type of drug test consists of a skin patch that measures drugs and drug metabolites in perspiration. The patch, which looks like a large adhesive bandage, is applied to the skin and worn for some length of time. A gas-permeable membrane on the patch protects the tested area from dirt and other contaminants. The sweat patch is sometimes used in the criminal justice system to monitor drug use by parolees and probationers, but so far it has not been widely used.

Oral Fluids

Traces of drugs, drug metabolites, and alcohol can be detected in oral fluids, the generic term for saliva and other material collected from the mouth. Oral fluids are easy to collect—a swab of the inner cheek is the most common way. They are harder to adulterate or substitute, and collection

is less invasive than with urine or hair testing. Because drugs and drug metabolites do not remain in oral fluids as long as they do in urine, this method shows more promise in determining current use and impairment.

Sources

Drug Enforcement Administration, [Drugs of Abuse](#), 2005, Drug Enforcement Administration Web site, [Drug Descriptions: Cocaine](#), National Institute on Drug Abuse, InfoFacts: Crack and Cocaine, August 2008, National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975–2007. Volume II: College Students & Adults Ages 19–45](#) (PDF), 2008, National Institute on Drug Abuse, InfoFacts: Crack and Cocaine, August 2008, Drug Enforcement Administration Web site, [Drug Descriptions: Cocaine](#), National Institute on Drug Abuse, InfoFacts: Crack and Cocaine, August 2008, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Cocaine: Abuse and Addiction, November 2004, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse, Street Terms: Drugs and the Drug Trade Cocaine section Source: Office of National Drug Control Policy, Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse, Street Terms Drugs and the Drug Trade, Marijuana Terms. United States of America National Institute on Drug Abuse, InfoFacts: Marijuana, June 2008 United States of America National Institute on Drug Abuse, Research Report Series—Marijuana Abuse, October 2005