

Child Protective Services: Appendix

Appendix A

Drug Tests

Alcohol and other drugs are ingested into the body in various ways. They are absorbed into various parts of the body through the bloodstream, and then processed by the liver, where they are converted into metabolites. Different drugs and their metabolites are excreted from the body at different rates, making time a critical factor in successful detection by a drug/toxicology screen.

Blood alcohol levels and breath analyzers and salvia test are the most common screening mechanisms to test for alcohol use. Alcohol leaves the body rapidly, making detection difficult if not done right away within 6-8 hours.

For drugs other than alcohol, urine is the most commonly used means to detect usage. Urine screening methods used by most laboratories generally can detect drug metabolites no more than 48-72 hours following use. Drugs such as marijuana and PCP (phencyclidine) are fat soluble and can often be found in the urine several days after use. Other substance such as cocaine and amphetamine are water soluble and are excreted more rapidly.

A negative toxicology result does not apply to a drug that was not included in the screen. For example, many labs do not routinely screen for PCP or marijuana. Therefore, without a specific request that the urine be screened for those drugs, these substances would not be identified even if they were actually present.

The quality of control over specimen handling and collection procedures has a significant impact on screening results. Specimens are easily manipulated (e.g., providing someone else's urine, or diluting the sample with toilet water).

False positives and false negatives do occur at times. This stresses the importance of using collateral data, and other assessment information to support the findings. If there is question about the accuracy of the result, the department may request another screen or a more specific screen, called a "confirmatory test." Chain of custody handling procedures must be utilized with all specimens, especially when they are being sent to a laboratory for confirmation.