



Beyond the 5-Panel Drug Test

When implementing a non-federally-regulated company drug testing policy, employers have many options. Where to test, what substances to test, and the science behind it should influence an employer's decision. And of course, the workplace environment and demographic may impact the final protocol. Before signing any drug testing policy into practice, employers need a basic understanding of the tests they are ordering.

Standard 5-Panel

This is the most widely-used testing protocol, primarily because it provides a global snapshot of some of the most commonly abused illegal substances. The test detects:

- **Amphetamine**
Stimulant commonly known as "speed", includes methamphetamine
Urine detection time: Up to 4 days after use
- **Cocaine**
Drug screens isolate the cocaine metabolite benzoylecgonine
Urine detection time: Up to 4 days after use
- **Opiates**
Substances naturally derived from poppy resin, including codeine, morphine and heroin
Urine detection time: Up to 4 days after use
- **Phencyclidine (PCP)**
Commonly known as "angel dust"
Urine detection time: Up to 14 days after use
- **Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)**
Primary active compound in marijuana
Urine detection time: Up to 30 days after use

7-Panel Test

Since the most common illegal substances are included in the standard 5-panel test, employers who choose to include additional panels often screen for legal substances that may be abused. Although a multitude of substance detection panels are available, the majority of 7-panel screens test for the standard 5 plus these two:

- **Benzodiazepine**
Legally prescribed for treatment of anxiety, insomnia, and seizures
Abuse mirrors alcohol intoxication with specific and numerous adverse physical effects
Urine detection time: Up to 7 days after use
- **Barbiturates**
Medical use for anesthesia, sedation, and formerly for treatment of anxiety disorders
Abuse mirrors alcohol intoxication, with high potential for overdose
Urine detection time: Up to 7 days after use

Expanded Testing Panels

To further screen potential drug abusers for dangerous misuse of both illegal and legal substances, many employers implement up to 10 (or more) testing panels in their drug screening protocols. When environmental factors, such as pharmaceutical work, pose an exposure risk, or when company history provides well-documented cause for including expansive testing panels, employers will add any number of the following detection panels to the 7 listed above:

- **Ecstasy (MDMA)**

Synthetic, psychoactive drug that produces feelings of euphoria and time distortion
Urine detection time: Up to 3 days after use

- **Hydrocodone (Vicodin) / Oxycodone (OxyContin)**

Synthetic opiates prescribed for pain relief and cough suppression
The most frequently abused legal substances with addictive properties similar to heroin
Urine detection time: Up to 4 days (single use) or up to 2 weeks (habitual user) after use

- **Methadone**

Synthetic opiate used in treating morphine, heroin, and other opiate addictions
Urine detection time: Up to 5 days after use

- **Methaqualone**

Commonly known as “Quaaludes”, this depressant is similar to barbiturates
Urine detection time: Up to 6 days after use

- **Propoxyphene**

Narcotic pain reliever and cough suppressant similar to opiates
Urine detection time: Up to 3 days after use

The Take-Away

Depending on the specific needs and intent of a given employer, testing any combination of the drugs listed above can help reduce risk for drug-induced accidents and injuries, reduce the potential for absenteeism, and ultimately deter drug abusers from even completing a job application.

In 2010, nearly 9% of all people in the United States used illegal drugs – including 21.5% of all U.S. citizens between ages 18 and 25. Statistically, businesses with 10 or more employees on their payroll are likely employing at least one illegal drug user. An appropriate drug testing policy is a cost-effective way to limit the potential risks these users pose toward business and industry.

Sources:

<http://www.drugabuse.gov>

<http://www.crlcorp.com/facilityTestList.cfm?facilityID=CLS>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov>

<http://thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2011/09/08/study-22-million-americans-use-illegal-drugs-3/>