



CONSUMER GUIDE TO HOME DRUG TESTING



Bucks County, PA



Acknowledgements

This Consumer's Guide to Home Drug Testing was developed with the assistance and input of a working group of parents, medical professionals, school personnel, community coalition members and other professionals. Additionally county government personnel participated in its development, including the Bucks County Department of Health, Bucks County Department of Corrections, and Bucks County Juvenile Probation. This guide was produced by Bucks County Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. under contract with Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.



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This project is made possible by an agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs. The Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs specifically disclaims responsibility for any analyses, interpretations, or conclusions herein.



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Frequently Asked Questions:

I think my child may be drunk or high right now...I'm worried he's in danger....What should I do?

If there is an immediate danger,

CALL 9-1-1

or take your child to the emergency room of your local hospital.

This guide is not to be used to advise parents in an emergency.

What are some signs that my child might be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?

- Speech: Slurred
- Movements: Unsteady
- Eyes: Glassy, red, or dilated pupils
- Responsiveness: Overly irritable, lethargic, or inappropriate
- Odor: Alcohol/Marijuana on breath or clothing

I want a professional to assess my child for alcohol or other drug use. Who do I call?

- Ask your family doctor for a recommendation
- Seek the services of a certified drug and alcohol counselor
- Call one of several organizations that assess children for substance use. See page 15 of this guide for contact information.

Will most test kits tell me if my child has been drinking alcohol?

No. Most test kits do not test for the presence of alcohol. See page 8 for more information on this topic.

Are home drug tests foolproof?

No. While home drug tests are generally accurate, they are not foolproof and can be misleading in a number of ways. See pages 10-11 for more details.

Introduction

The **Consumer Guide to Home Drug Testing** addresses commonly asked questions and concerns about the use of these tests. *If you are concerned that a child in your care might be in immediate danger call 911 or seek medical attention right away.*

Adolescence is a critical period of human development in which the body and brain grow and change rapidly. Families function better and children mature more successfully when they grow up alcohol and drug free. The idea that alcohol and other drug use is normal for teens is mistaken, and parents must set and communicate clear, drug-free standards to guide children away from drugs. Conversations about these family rules should begin early, during the child's elementary school years, and should continue through adolescence and college.

What's the Big Deal?

Substance abuse is a significant danger to the health and safety of young people. Despite the best efforts of parents, educators, and communities, children of all ages still experiment with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Addiction or other serious health problems can be a result of this experimentation.

Each year thousands of children die from substance use, either as a result of unintended overdose, reactions with medications, or substance-related accidents. **These deaths are preventable.** Research has shown that the brain of a child is not fully mature until they reach their early twenties. Early introduction of alcohol and drugs is known to delay the healthy development of the brain.

What's the Solution?

There are many approaches a parent may take to create a drug and alcohol free environment. One of the most important is to engage in clear and ongoing communication with your family about what is acceptable behavior in your household. During adolescence ongoing communication within the family is one of the keys to successful prevention.

Parents may consider the use of home drug testing as a prevention

approach. These tests can serve both as a deterrent or as a method to find out whether drug use has already occurred. There are many different risks and benefits of this kind of testing.

An Important Word of Caution:

Home drug testing is a personal decision that only you can make for your family. It is not a magical solution, and should be entered into with care. No drug test can be considered a replacement for a professional assessment. Please read this guide carefully as it may help you to decide whether home drug testing is right for your family.

Deciding if Home Drug Testing is Right for Your Family:

Ask yourself these questions. If you are unsure, ask your family doctor or pharmacist for assistance:

- Is the test I am considering designed for **home use by parents**?
- What are the **risks and benefits** of the type of testing I am considering?
- Am I prepared to discuss with my child my **reasons for using** a home drug test?
- Do I fully understand what this test kit **can and cannot** tell me?
- Am I prepared to follow sample collection instructions **exactly**?
- Am I ready and prepared to act **calmly and thoughtfully** if my child tests positive for drug use? Do I know what steps to take next?
- Is a laboratory retest recommended? Will I **commit to follow through** with laboratory re-testing if my child receives a positive home drug test result? Do I know how to do this?

Potential Benefits of Home Drug Testing

Drug Testing is One Part of a Prevention Message

Many believe that the presence of a drug testing kit in the home is a deterrent to alcohol and other drug use by children. In short, the practice of home testing is believed to help strengthen the child's belief that if they use drugs their parents can detect this with a drug test, which may prevent the child from using drugs in the first place.

Drug Testing as an Excuse to Say "No!"

Others report that the knowledge that he or she may be tested at any time may also give a child a believable explanation to share with friends and others about why they choose not to use drugs. In this way, the child may be better able to resist peer pressure without "losing face."

Drug Testing Provides a Quick Answer

Parents who are concerned their child may be high, or may have used drugs recently, may choose to employ a home drug testing kit to find out if there are traces of drugs still in the body. While home testing results may be obtained rapidly, a home drug testing kit can only provide a preliminary screen for substance use and results should be verified by laboratory testing (see page 9-10 for more on this topic). The desire for *rapid information* is understandable, but must be balanced with the need for *accurate information*. Evaluation by a substance use professional may be of assistance in reaching this balance.

Privacy

Some parents may view a child's substance use as a family matter and may not wish to involve the school or health care systems, although ideally these systems work together for the benefit of young people. For these families, home drug testing may give the family the desired privacy to address substance use in the home. However, parents should understand there are confidentiality laws designed to safeguard healthcare information shared with a professional. Many resources are available in the community, outside of the home, through county government, and school systems that may assist parents if substance use by their child is suspected. There is a listing of community resources on page 12-16 of this guide.

Detecting Multiple Drugs

Another potential benefit of home testing is the ability of many tests to look for a range of different substances. Some tests may detect up to 12 different substances, although test kits do vary widely. Parents who are worried their child might be using drugs may have no idea what type of substance may be involved. Therefore, a kit that tests for a wider range of substances may be able to give parents information not only about whether drug use has occurred, but what type of drug has been used. However, it is very important to note that most home testing kits are not designed to test for alcohol usage, which is important because alcohol is by far the most commonly misused drug by adolescents.

Limitations of Home Drug Testing

Despite their apparent usefulness and convenience, there are some potential limitations that a parent must understand when considering a home drug testing kit. These do not necessarily negate the value of testing, but are important factors to know in order to use testing safely and effectively.

Drug Testing is One Part of a Larger Equation

Home drug testing, if used, should be only one part of a family's overall plan to prevent alcohol and other drug use by teens. Testing is a tool, and, if chosen, should be nested within a larger plan that involves active discussions about drug and alcohol use, parental monitoring of the child's free time, and appropriate role modeling by parents. Don't rely on a single strategy.

Drug Testing Instructions Must Be Followed Precisely

Each testing kit should provide clear instructions that explain how the test should be appropriately given. Failure to follow the instructions carefully may easily lead to inaccurate results. One of the most important of these instructions is to follow the guidelines for laboratory re-testing in the event that a home drug test returns an initial positive result. In essence, it is incorrect to assume that a positive test result is definitive proof of drug use unless a secondary retest is conducted to confirm the results. Home testing is not and should not be considered complete until the retest is conducted.

Not all Test Kits are Created Equal

Each testing kit on the market should list the drugs that it tests for. Some may test for only a single drug, while others may test for up to twelve different drugs. A test that is not designed to detect cocaine for example cannot return a positive result for that drug even if it is present. The more comprehensive the test, the more likely it will detect substances.

Home Test Results are only A Snapshot in Time

The results of any home drug testing only examines a “snapshot in time.” In other words, a test kit can only detect if substances have been used within a certain window of time. This window varies from drug to drug. A negative test result may only indicate that a drug has not been used in the recent past, and a negative result is not a guarantee that future use will not occur, so parents must remain watchful.

What Types of Drug Tests are Available?

The testing of a sample of urine is the most common method of home drug testing. In this type of test the person is asked to urinate directly into a test cup. Most over-the-counter drug tests use urine testing. The advantage of this method is the wide availability of a range of over-the-counter kits available to test urine. Disadvantages include that obtaining a sample can be embarrassing and awkward for both the parent and the adolescent, because direct observation of production of the specimen (watching the child urinate) is recommended to ensure that the sample is valid and that no cheating by adding a substance, dilution with water, or substitution of a different sample is attempted. Direct observation may be experienced as invasive for the adolescent.

To avoid this obstacle, it is possible to test hair samples or saliva samples for traces of drugs and alcohol as well. However, these kits are generally not available over-the-counter in pharmacies. Parents may also wish to consider how quickly test results are desired. Testing hair samples can take several weeks, while urine and saliva sample-based tests can provide rapid results, but only of the initial test. Parents must remember that laboratory testing of urine or saliva is still necessary and may require several additional days. Costs of home test kits may vary from under \$10.00 to up to \$100.00. Much of the cost difference is based on the number of drugs that a test can detect. Kits which test for multiple drugs

are generally more expensive than simpler kits which may test for only one or two drugs. If a parent is concerned about a particular drug, such as marijuana, a test which only looks for marijuana early may be fitting. However, should the parent be interested in preventing and/or detecting multiple drugs, a “multiple panel” test may be chosen.

Where Can I Get a Drug Testing Kit?

Urine drug testing kits can be purchased in most local pharmacies, without a prescription. Most pharmacies carry more than one kit, although they may stock a single brand name. Generally, stores sell kits which range from testing for a single drug (a single test panel) to the ability to test for up to 12 different drugs (a multiple panel test). Additionally, many pharmacies carry home breathalyzer kits for the detection of alcohol. If purchasing a test from a drug store, it is recommended that you review your selection with the pharmacist or your family doctor to ensure that it is appropriate for home use and that it will meet your particular testing needs. Generally, pharmacies only carry test kits which employ urine samples as the testing medium.

It is also possible to purchase drug testing kits from a variety of websites. Purchasing through this route may provide for more privacy. However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has reported that home drug testing kits which are sold on-line frequently do not meet FDA standards and may have misleading labeling. Saliva and hair sample testing are other methods to test for drug misuse. However, these types of tests are not generally available in drug stores. Instead, they may be ordered either by mail or through the Internet, although the above cautions still apply.

My Child Just Tested Positive. What Do I Do Now?

A positive result on a home drug test is a cause for concern. However, it is important that parents remain calm and act thoughtfully. Remember, a positive home test result is only preliminary. Before parents take any action, it is absolutely necessary that parents obtain a confirmation test. This is done by a laboratory and there should be directions with your test kit informing you of how to obtain this laboratory test. This step is quite important because it is possible for the home test to return a “false positive” result, meaning that the screen indicates that traces of a drug are present, when in fact there has been no actual drug use. The laboratory

confirmation test is more technically advanced than the home kit itself and can do a more accurate job of detecting actual use.

While awaiting laboratory confirmation, it is not recommended that parents immediately enact punishments or initiate an assessment, unless an adolescent admits to use. Should it occur, an admission of use can be a beginning point for an important discussion, but parents should still proceed with confirmation testing. It is also wise to monitor the child more closely, whether they admit use or not, while awaiting laboratory test confirmation.

If the confirmation test also returns a positive result, or if the adolescent admits to use, parents should act to more fully understand the scope of the drug use. This is generally done by obtaining an alcohol and other drug assessment by a professional. As noted above, parents may also choose to monitor their child's time and movements more closely while the assessment is being arranged.

My Child's Drug Test was Negative...Can I Relax?

A negative result on a home drug test can be a welcome relief to concerned parents, but parents must understand fully what a negative result means. A negative result on a home test is not a guarantee that a child is not using drugs, either in the past or in the future. It simply means that evidence for the use of a certain group of substances over a certain period of time cannot be detected by the home test. It is possible that drug use has occurred, but far enough in the past so that it cannot be detected by the home test. Also, parents must remember that not all home tests actually look for all substances. Therefore a test that does not test for cocaine, for example, cannot give parents any information on whether the child has used cocaine. The label of each home test will list the substances that it searches for, but no single test can test for all substances, so negative results must be understood with this in mind.

Finally, it is possible for a child to intentionally interfere with a drug test so that it returns a "false negative" result. A false negative result means that, while there may be traces of a drug in the body, the home test fails to detect that it is present. There are numerous methods that a child may employ in an attempt to beat a drug test. Unfortunately, information on many of these methods is easily obtained from the Internet. Evidence that

a child may be searching out these methods is suggestive that drug use may have occurred.

Parents are encouraged to give their child positive feedback if their drug test comes back with a negative result. Praise and encouragement are powerful ways to shape future behavior. Parents are also encouraged to continue with ongoing discussions with their children about the risks of using, the benefits of not using, and their expectations that their child not use drugs or alcohol. This conveys that the parents are concerned and aware and that they will take assertive action if they believe drug and alcohol use is occurring.

What are Some Alternatives to Home Drug Testing?

In addition to utilizing a home testing kit, there are some additional community-based options for testing that parents should be aware of. Drug testing can be performed by your child's pediatrician or family medical practice. This alternative may lessen some of the discomfort associated with urine sample collection and ensures that a licensed laboratory performs the testing. Parents interested in this option are encouraged to contact their child's medical practice to discuss their procedures and, if desired, arrange an appointment. A physician or other health care professional may be able to assist with assessment and referral to a substance abuse professional as well, if desired or recommended.

Additionally, professional labs in the community may also be a resource that parents can utilize to accomplish drug testing. A physician's prescription may be required to initiate testing, but the use of a laboratory can also eliminate concerns associated with sample collection and interpretation of results.

Community Resources

There are a range of community resources that can be helpful to your family. These include prevention education and activities, assessment, treatment, self-help groups, family support, and recovery support services.

Prevention: Prevention education by parents is the first line of defense against the development of experimentation and substance use problems.

Parents are encouraged to have clear and honest discussions on a regular basis with their adolescent about not using substances. Research shows that parents who do so are much less likely to have an adolescent who develops substance-related problems. Additionally, many communities and schools provide prevention initiatives and parents are encouraged to participate actively in them. Should any substance use be known to them, parents are encouraged to act assertively to address the problem, through early intervention. This may take the form of additional education, brief counseling, and other family-based efforts to support abstinence and promote healthier choices.

Assessment: A full assessment conducted by a licensed or certified drug and alcohol professional is an essential first step in addressing known or suspected substance use by adolescents. The purpose of the assessment is to obtain a fuller picture of the adolescent and family, to understand his or her strengths and problems, and to identify the extent to which the substance use may or may not be present. If present, an assessment will help to evaluate whether the substance use is experimental or addictive in nature. Upon completion of the assessment, the professional should be able to provide the family a concrete impression of the problem or problems and some clear recommendations on how to proceed (next steps) to address the problem. The final pages of this guide lists sites where parents can arrange for a professional substance use assessment.

Treatment: One outcome that may arise as a result of assessment is a recommendation for professional treatment. Treatment may range from outpatient individual counseling on a weekly basis, to group counseling several times per week, or even 24 hour inpatient care for several days or longer. The type and length of treatment recommended will be based upon the information the professional gathers and upon the availability of local resources. Parents who have an adolescent who receives a recommendation for treatment are encouraged to work closely with their assessment provider to match their adolescent with the recommended level and type of care.

Self-Help Groups: Over the years many people have found that self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) have been very helpful to individuals seeking to stop using substances. These meetings are free, anonymous, relatively common, and open to anyone who has a desire to stop using. Some groups, however, are targeted to young people. There are other self-help groups that may

offer similar assistance. Self-help groups are generally not professionally facilitated. Instead they utilize peer support to help each other refrain from use and address related problems.

Recovery Support Services: Once an individual has chosen to stop using substances, additional supports that assist that individual to maintain their abstinence can be quite helpful. These supports are called Recovery Support Services, and they generally involve practical, peer-to-peer support and education by others who have conquered similar problems.

Family Education and Support: Substance abuse issues often impact and confuse family members of the person who is using or has used. Parents and other family members may not be sure how to help the affected individual, when and how to set limits, and how to take care of themselves in the face of a substance-using or addicted family member. Family education and supports can be of assistance to concerned and struggling families.



General Disclaimer:

This consumer guide is intended to provide the public with general information about home drug testing. It is not intended to be a recommendation for or against the practice of home testing. Rather, it is intended to help parents and others understand its potential risks and benefits. Caution and careful thought is urged when considering, choosing, and implementing home testing and when interpreting and confirming home testing kit results. The safest and wisest course of action is to seek a professional assessment if you have a concern that your adolescent may be using alcohol or other drugs.

**Bucks County Resources
For Assessment & Treatment Of
Alcohol and Other Drug Problems**

If you are covered by a health insurance policy, you must first contact this company for a listing of approved assessment and treatment agencies in your community. The contact information can be found on the back of your insurance card.

If you do not have health insurance, you may be eligible for Medicare, Medical Assistance or county funding. The following assessment sites will assist you in making this determination.

With county funds preference is given to pregnant women and intravenous drug users in the provision of assessment and treatment services.

<p>Aldie Counseling Center 228 North Main Street Doylestown, PA 18901 215-345-8530 www.aldie.org</p>	<p>Aldie Counseling Center 3369 Progress Drive I-95 Industrial Park Bensalem, PA 19020 215-642-3231 www.aldie.org</p>
<p>Penn Foundation – The Recovery Center 807 Lawn Avenue Sellersville, PA 18960 215-257-9999 1-800-245-7366 www.pennfoundation.org</p>	<p>TODAY, Inc. (Adolescents) P.O. Box 908 Newtown, PA 18940 215-948-4713 www.todayinc.org</p>
<p>Bucks County Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence, Inc. Bailiwick Office Campus 252 West Swamp Road Unit 12 Doylestown, PA 18901 24 HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-221-6333 www.bccadd.org</p>	<p>Family Services Association of Bucks County 4 Cornerstone Drive Langhorne, PA 19047 215-757-6916 www.fsabc.org Specialty – those with a co- occurring mental illness; HIV/ AIDS; Older Adults</p>

Treatment & Recovery Services

As part of your assessment visit, the counselor will advise you of the type of treatment you or your child may need and your options for treatment and recovery. The agencies listed on page 15 will let you know of your options, including the names of additional treatment facilities in your community.

For more information about the full array of services available to you as a Bucks County resident, go to the website:
www.bucks.pa.networkofcare.org

If you have a complaint about assessment or treatment services you receive, contact:

Bucks County Drug & Alcohol Commission, Inc.
Complaint and Grievance Department
215-773-9313 dnacomplaints@co.bucks.pa.us



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