

# Drug Testing: Processes & Good Practice

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## The drug testing process

Regardless of where testing occurs or the type of testing technology utilised, drug testing is a two-step process. Step 1 involves an initial on-site screen, using a point of collection test (POCT) device. Most point of collection test devices use immunoassay techniques that are less reliable and accurate than laboratory analysis. For this reason, step 2 involves laboratory analysis to confirm the accuracy of any initial on-site screen that detects the presence of a drug. Laboratory analysis typically involves more reliable and accurate mass-spectrometry techniques.

## Good practice in drug testing

Good practice dictates that the drug testing process must comply with the relevant Australian Standards – AS/NZS 4308:2008 (urine) and AS 4760-2006 (oral fluid/saliva). The purpose of these standards is to ensure that the initial on-site screen and confirmatory laboratory procedures meet the requirements for reliable detection and quantitation of drugs in biological specimens.

The Standards cover procedures for:

- specimen collection, storage, handling & dispatch/transport to a laboratory
- chain of custody procedures
- qualifications and training required for on-site specimen collectors and laboratory personnel
- quality control management of onsite and laboratory test devices/methods.

The Standards also stipulate cut point levels for a positive on-site screen and laboratory analysis. While there are no Australian Standards for hair testing, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency has produced a hair testing protocol.

Any potential beneficial effect of drug testing is likely to be realised when it is combined with a more comprehensive response that provides better access to treatment, de-stigmatisation and improved support.

More comprehensive responses also need to be tailored to meet the specific needs and circumstances of the target group.

In addition, responses need to include strategies to minimise the risk of unexpected negative outcomes known to be associated with testing. One unexpected negative outcome is that rather than changing their behaviour to reduce drug use or related risk of harm, the target group may simply change their behaviour to avoid detection. When this occurs, drug testing programs are likely to have counter-productive consequences.



## Good practice in workplace drug testing

To be effective, any strategy for improving workplace safety needs to be:

1. based on principles of good practice, and
2. accepted by employees.

For drug testing to be accepted by employees, it should be justified as being required to address an identified risk and the associated policy and procedures need to be adequately disseminated and applied in a procedurally fair manner.

It also needs to:

- result in counselling, treatment, and rehabilitation rather than punitive outcomes
- target safety sensitive and integrity reliant work roles
- allow for employee input into the development and implementation of the program
- allow for a right of appeal
- incorporate appropriate education and training.

## Good practice guidelines

Good practice guidelines are efficient and cost effective and are the standard procedures used by most reputable drug testing service providers. Following these guidelines will also help ensure protection from any unfair dismissal claims.

### References

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (2007). Drug and alcohol screening protocol. AHPRA, Melbourne. Available at: <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Monitoring-and-compliance/Drug-and-alcohol-screening.aspx>. Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017.

Standards Australia (2006). Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs in oral fluid: AS4760-2006. Standards Australia, Sydney.

Standards Australia (2008). Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs in urine: AS/NZS 4308:2008. Standards Australia, Sydney.

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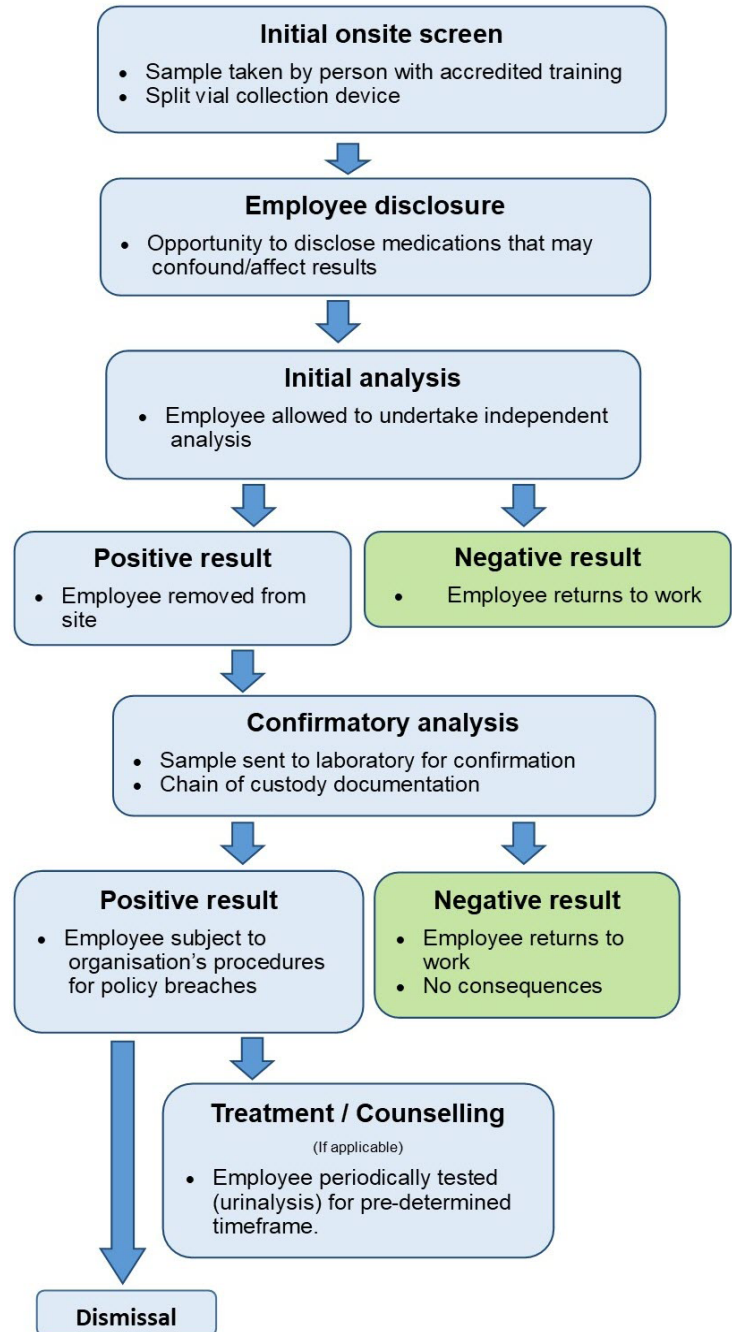


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## Good Practice Guidelines



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