

Occupational Health Group is a service offered to the business community of North Alabama by Huntsville Hospital and Decatur General Hospital Systems

What Drug Screening Choices Does My Company Have?

by R. Michael Lowery, M.D.

Before that question can be answered, you must first know whether your company falls under “regulated” or “non-regulated” testing. These terms refer to the two sets of rules that guide drug testing in the workplace.

Regulated testing is a stricter model developed by the federal government to test individuals in safety sensitive jobs or positions. Examples of safety sensitive positions include commercial drivers, airline employees, railroad employees, Coast Guard members, research and special projects employees and mass transit employees. Testing individuals who work in jobs overseen by federal agencies require the use of a special “federal” chain of custody form. Reasons for testing can include pre-placement (post offer), post-accident, suspected impairment (for cause), and random testing. Currently, urine drug testing is the only method allowed under “regulated” testing.

Regulated testing is the gold standard for drug screening. It has several safeguards to ensure quality and accuracy. These include specified collection procedures with a tight chain of custody, use of certified testing laboratories, procuring split samples, and test interpretation by a Medical Review Officer (MRO). Test results, both negative and positive, must be reviewed by the MRO.

While the reasons for non-regulated testing can be similar, the governing rules can be more varied. Guidelines governing non-regulated testing originate from state law or employer specific policies. For example, in non-regulated testing an expanded set of drugs can be tested for, a MRO may or may not be used, and rapid screening test can be utilized. Non-regulated testing should always be implemented on the basis of a written company policy, and in accordance with applicable state laws. Non-regulated testing must use a non-federal COC (chain of custody) form.

What is a rapid screening test? This screen, typically performed on site or in a doctor’s office, uses a color indicator to provide a test result in a matter of minutes. Several drugs may be tested. The standard panel can be the “NIDA-5” (cocaine, marijuana, amphetamine, opiates and PCP). Many employers use a seven drug panel, which typically adds barbiturates (Seconal, Phenobarbital) and benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium).

There are some disadvantages to rapid screening. The accuracy of rapid screening suffers in comparison with more sophisticated tests, yet some employers accept the reduced accuracy for the quick result. Rapid screens, whether done in the Occupational Health Group clinic, or in a large lab will produce a certain number of false negatives (negative results on a truly positive specimen), and false positives (positive results on a truly negative specimen). Because of the sheer number of negatives, false negatives do not undergo further confirmation testing. Due to the

importance of not falsely accusing an individual as an illicit drug user, all positives should undergo further testing by a confirmation process, as in the case of “regulated” type testing.

OHG sends all positive urine drug screens by the rapid screening method to a certified testing laboratory for confirmation testing. Usually, the lab confirms what the rapid test results have identified as positive, but a significant percent fail to confirm and, therefore, are reported as negative by the lab. In summary, some positives are missed by the screen and a drug user slips through, but all results reported as positive have been confirmed by a second process and are really true positives. The question only remains for the MRO to decide if the positive is a “legal positive” (the donor has a legal prescription or a legal reason for the drug in their system).

The DOT panel of five drugs has federally mandated cutoff levels for each of the five drugs, meaning that if the drug is present below the cutoff level, it is reported by the lab is negative. Drugs other than the “NIDA-5” have arbitrary cutoff levels determined by the laboratories and may not be as legally defensible in case of litigation.

Why pay extra for MRO services when it is non-mandated? The MRO personally contacts positive donors to determine if a legal or legitimate explanation exists for the positive test result. If so, the MRO reports the result as negative.

Article Continued on Page 2....

OHG Directory

Administration.....	(256) 922-6675
Marketing and Business Development.....	(256) 922-6677
Billing Department.....	(256) 922-6673
OHG - Huntsville.....	(256) 265-7000
OHG - Madison.....	(256) 774-7300
OHG - Decatur.....	(256) 353-4325
Wellness Services.....	(256) 922-6699

www.OHGonline.org



DECATUR

1615 Kathy Lane
Decatur, AL 35603
Phone: (256) 353-4325
Fax: (256) 353-9639

HUNTSVILLE

1963 Memorial Parkway
Suite 24
Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: (256) 265-7000
Fax: (256) 265-7003

MADISON

9238 Madison Boulevard
Building 1, Ste. 200
Madison, AL 35758
Phone: (256) 774-7300
Fax: (256) 774-5300

WELLNESS

6767 Old Madison Pike
Building 4, Ste. 400
Huntsville, AL 35806
Phone: (256) 922-6699
Fax: (256) 922-6660

What Drug Screening Choices Does My Company Have? (con't)

by R. Michael Lowery, M.D.

If not, the MRO reports positive results. In Alabama, cocaine, opiates, marijuana, and amphetamines may be used legally under doctor's orders. Imagine the fallout if a donor is disciplined or terminated for a positive screen due to the use of a prescribed drug! The MRO's purpose is to make sure this doesn't happen. All regulated testing is mandated to use a MRO for all tests, both negative and positive. In "non-regulated" testing, the

employer has a choice of using or not using MRO services. The most legally defensible drug screening process is to use the regulated testing process for the five drugs and having the MRO investigate all positives. The cost of MRO services averages only about \$10 per drug screen, a small price to pay for producing a legally defensible final report to the employer and avoiding a defamation suit.

Differences Between "Regulated and "Non-Regulated Testing

Regulated Testing	Non-Regulated Testing
Origins of guidelines - Federal Regulations	Origin of Guidelines - State law/Employer policy
Forms - Federal	Forms - Non-Federal
Drugs Tested - "NIDA 5"	Drugs Tested - "NIDA 5" and others as desired
MRO Review - Mandatory	MRO Review - not mandatory, but highly encouraged for liability concerns
Pre-placement/post-offer, post accident, for cause, random (Mandatory)	Pre-placement/post-offer, post accident, for cause, random (Non-Mandatory)
Does not allow use of rapid screening test	Allows use of rapid screening test
Testing of urine only	Urine and hair tested most commonly, saliva and sweat are other options

Wellness Services Focus



Jessica Setzer, MS, ATC/L
Wellness Coordinator

There have been some changes in the Wellness Services division of Occupational Health Group (OHG). We are glad to announce that Jessica Setzer, Wellness Services' previous Wellness Specialist, is OHG's new Wellness Coordinator. We also have a new member of the OHG Wellness team in Heather LeClerc who has joined OHG as the new Wellness Specialist.

Jessica Setzer is a native of Huntsville. She received her Bachelor of Science in Biology with an exercise physiology emphasis from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. She received her Master of Science in Kinesiology from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. While at Indiana University, Jessica was a graduate assistant athletic trainer. Jessica is a Certified Athletic Trainer and is state licensed. She is also a Certified Occupational Hearing Conservationist and an Industrial Audiometric Technician. She is a member of the National Athletic Trainer's Association, the Southeastern Athletic Trainer's Association and the Alabama Athletic Trainer's Association.

Before taking the position of Wellness Coordinator, Jessica was the Wellness Specialist for OHG. Prior to joining the OHG team, Jessica was a certified athletic trainer for Huntsville Hospital Therapy Services in the high school setting. Jessica was employed by the UAH Housing Department, as a Resident Director, prior to her position

at Huntsville Hospital. Jessica has a long-standing passion for worksite wellness and is excited to manage the wellness team.

Heather LeClerc's background is in Fitness and Wellness Promotion. She graduated from Texas Tech University with a B.S. in Exercise Sport Science with an emphasis in Fitness and Wellness Promotion. She was previously employed at the YMCA of Huntsville as a Personal Fitness Trainer as well as with the American Red Cross as a First Aid, CPR, AED Instructor. Previous to that, Heather worked as an Exercise Specialist in a Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program. She is currently certified through the American College of Sports Medicine as a Health and Fitness Instructor. Heather has a great passion for fitness, wellness and health education.



Heather LeClerc
Wellness Specialist

Drug-Free Workplace Presentation

Dr. James Gauthier, Medical Director of OHG, delivered a presentation for the National Safety Council at the Greenbrier Restaurant in Madison, entitled, "Drug Screening in the Workplace". The presentation on February 21st detailed the types of drug screens available to employers today, as well as the reasoning for drug testing in the workplace.



DECATUR

1615 Kathy Lane
Decatur, AL 35603
Phone: (256) 353-4325
Fax: (256) 353-9639

HUNTSVILLE

1963 Memorial Parkway
Suite 24
Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: (256) 265-7000
Fax: (256) 265-7003

MADISON

9238 Madison Boulevard
Building 1, Ste. 200
Madison, AL 35758
Phone: (256) 774-7300
Fax: (256) 774-5300

WELLNESS

6767 Old Madison Pike
Building 4, Ste. 400
Huntsville, AL 35806
Phone: (256) 922-6699
Fax: (256) 922-6660