



## Toxicology FAQ

Toxicology testing can be a valuable part of treatment for substance use disorders and is one of many tools that are available and used as source of information to guide treatment decisions. Toxicology testing should inform your treatment plan and should not be used as a punitive tool, but rather is a tool that can be used in clinical discussions with your treatment team around progress towards your goals.

### **Reasons why we do testing:**

Your expressed needs and goals are the guiding force for treatment decisions, including toxicologies. These should be done in a way that is respectful to your culture, your values, and your previous experiences. Some of the factors that are considered when requesting toxicologies:

- May be done during initial assessments to gain an understanding of current use patterns and may be used to guide decisions of what substances are tested during course of treatment.
- To assess level of risk with current substance level use and potential need for identifying different levels of support/care.
- To support assessment of progress and treatment, including assessment of overall health, wellness, and functioning.
- To facilitate discussions about reducing the harms from and providing education around substance use.
- To help build understanding of whether symptoms you are experiencing are related to substances of use and/or medical and mental health conditions. e.g. substance-induced psychosis v schizophrenia; seizures
- To provide documentation to mandated programs or external parties, when your consent is provided to do so.

### **When we test:**

At intake/admission into services



When requested by you (the client)

As clinically indicated during treatment and/or as agreed upon with your treatment team

No more than once per week

If a court mandates 2 or more toxicology tests per week, the responsibility of those extra toxicology tests are the responsibility of the Court.

If you are or become pregnant while engaged in treatment, the current guidance from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not recommend routine toxicology testing during pregnancy and delivery, or for the newborn.

**What to expect:**

Toxicology testing may include urine samples or oral swabs.

A non-judgmental discussion with your primary counselor prior to testing to share any recent substances of use.

You should expect to have fully informed consent which means a clear discussion with your confirmed understanding of the potential harms, consequences, and benefits of screening, including, but not limited to, your right to provide written consent for disclosure, a description of any legal requirements for healthcare providers when toxicology results are positive (e.g., reporting requirements when a newborn is affected by substance exposure; a discussion of additional federal and/or New York State reporting requirements), and a discussion of the patient's ability to refuse toxicology testing unless it is mandated by an outside entity such as a court.

Toxicology testing will be facilitated in a private area with respect to your experiences, culture, and individual needs, such as preferred gender of person providing toxicology.

If there is concern about the integrity of the sample provided, you may be requested to provide an alternative method of toxicology.

Direct observation of urine sample collection for toxicology is not part of the usual clinical practice, unless there is a need to do so that supports your goals.

If testing on-site is a barrier, you can request to complete toxicology testing with an off-site lab through your counselor.



In rare circumstances, when direct observation of urine sample collection is indicated, transgender, gender non-conforming patients have the right to state which gender they prefer to have of staff monitoring and should be asked for this information prior to collection. If not comfortable with the available staff, you are able to engage in testing off-site, as stated above.

**How are results used:**

This is not an indication of treatment progress or lack thereof and serves as an additional source of information to support treatment. Therefore, results cannot be used in a punitive manner within the program.

Once returned, all results, both positive and negative, should be reviewed and discussed with you. You will have the opportunity to discuss the results and any discrepancies with self-reported substance use with your counselor, as well as any highlighted harms with combination of substances with results that have come in.

Additionally, the pattern of toxicology test completion or refusal thereof and any results can assist in modifying your treatment plan, when needed.

Results of toxicologies will not be used as grounds for program discharge.

**Reporting to Third Parties:**

Your counselor can help you to understand the details and potential consequences of your mandates around toxicology testing and assist you in making informed decisions.

You will need to consent to release of any toxicology results being shared with others. It is your right to allow release of toxicology results through an informed decision and consent. You are allowed to remove consent at any time to release your toxicology results at any time (other than certain criminal justice consents).