

Information for parents and carers

Drug testing for young people

If a young person is charged with a crime that is sometimes linked to drugs, they are asked to take a drug test.

The results are used to help them get treatment and support.

This leaflet will answer some of the questions you might have.

About the test



- The drug test takes place in the police station where the young person has been charged.
- The test doesn't hurt and takes only a few minutes.
- A police officer or a trained police worker takes a sample of saliva from the young person's mouth.
- The test shows if the young person has recently taken heroin, crack or cocaine.

Who is at the test?

If a young person is aged 14 to 16

- An adult must be present when the young person is asked to take the test and during the test itself. This person is called an appropriate adult. They are there to give advice to the young person and to make sure that they understand what is happening to them, and why.
- If the young person you care for is aged 14 to 16, you may be acting as their appropriate adult.
- An appropriate adult can also be someone who has been appointed by a local authority or voluntary organisation (for example, a social worker).

If a young person is aged 17

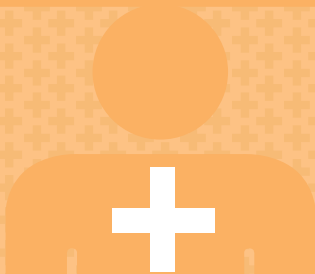
- An adult does not have to be present during the test, except in special circumstances. These are when the young person has mental health problems, learning disabilities, or is seen to be vulnerable.

How the test works



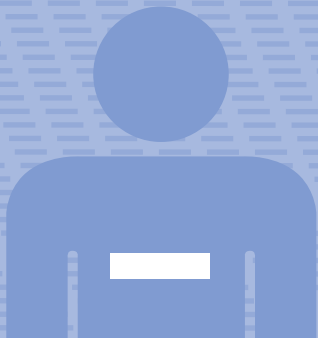
- The body breaks drugs down into chemicals.
- Drug tests look for these chemicals – and the original drug – in saliva.
- A positive result means that a certain amount of drugs have been found.
- A negative result means that less than this amount, or no drugs at all, have been found.

If the test is positive



- A youth support worker (sometimes called an arrest referral worker) will try to talk to the young person about getting help and treatment.
- We will not charge the young person with having taken drugs and the results will not be used to re-examine the crime they were charged with.
- The courts may use the results to help decide whether to give bail.
- If the young person is found guilty of the crime they are charged with, the courts will use the results to help decide what sentence they should be given. They can take into account that the young person has misused drugs and may decide to help them get treatment.

If the test is negative



- The test looks for a specified level of drugs. If the test finds less than this amount, or none at all, the result will be negative.
- This does not necessarily mean that the young person hasn't taken heroin, crack or cocaine. This is because the amount of drugs in the body drops over time. There just may not be enough drugs present to get a positive result.
- They may take other drugs such as alcohol or cannabis.
- A young person can still talk to a youth support worker if they want help or more information.

Does the young person have to take the test?



- Young people are tested for drugs so that they can get help and treatment. The results of the test are not used to punish them.
- It is an offence to refuse a test. It could lead to a fine. Or they could be given a sentence.
- If you are acting as an appropriate adult, you must be present when a police officer explains what happens if a test is refused.



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support about drugs, call
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