

Toxicology Frequently Asked Questions

- Are there different types of toxicology tests?

Tests generally fall into two types: screening and confirmatory.

	Screening	Confirmatory
Methodology	Usually enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) like pregnancy strep tests	GC/MS; LC/MS; others
Accuracy	Can have false positives and negatives	Very sensitive to the drug being tested for, but may have difficulty with the synthetics
Cost	Relatively inexpensive	More expensive than ELISA
Speed	Can be point of care, information available at time of visit	Needs to be sent off, delay in making clinical decisions

- When do I need to confirm the results of a toxicology test?

It is important to confirm unexpected results. If the result of the screening test matches your expected result, it is usually not necessary to obtain confirmation testing. Examples of unexpected results might include:

- A patient tests **positive** for a substance she states she is **not taking**
- A patient tests **negative** for a substance that is prescribed, and she indicates she is taking regularly

- Is doing a toxicology test the same as verbally screening for substance use?

No; even if you have results from a toxicology test, it is still very important to conduct verbal screening. A patient may have intermittently been using a substance during pregnancy, resulting in a negative toxicology test, but still should be referred for further treatment based on the results of the verbal screen.

- What can be used to test for substances? Are there reasons to test to choose one over another?

Multiple biological substances (aka matrix) can be used for toxicology testing including urine, oral fluid, blood, hair, meconium are the primary matrices.

- Can I tell how much my patient has been taking? How long ago did they take the substance they tested positive for?

Screening tests are qualitative, meaning they give you a yes or no answer if the substance is present. Confirmatory testing often does report a quantitative level, but this should **not** be used to infer how much of a substance has been used. Many factors are involved and any value over the cut off level should be seen as a qualitative positive unless evaluated by a medical review officer (MRO).

- Which substances are tested for when I order a Urine Drug Screen?

Multiple biological substances (aka matrix) can be used for toxicology testing including urine, oral fluid, blood, hair, meconium, and umbilical tissue are the primary matrices