

Chemical testing information

We understand that the process of drug and alcohol testing can be stressful. You might feel concerned or anxious about what is involved. This fact sheet explains what you can expect if you are asked to undergo testing as part of a health assessment.

When will we carry out testing?

If we receive any information about your health which includes concerns about substance use (ie drugs and/or alcohol) we will usually carry out chemical testing.

To test for drugs or alcohol, we may require blood and/or hair samples from you. This testing will be carried out by Cansford Laboratories, an independent chemical testing company we use for drug and alcohol testing.

What will we test?

We'll usually ask you to provide a blood and/or hair sample. Our usual approach is:

- For alcohol testing – a blood sample.
- For drug testing – a hair sample.

We will tell you if we need to do anything different.

If a hair sample is needed, the collector will take up to two samples, each half the thickness of a pencil - equivalent to 50-75 hairs. These will be taken as discreetly as possible, but there may be some cosmetic impact. Your hair needs to be 3 – 6 cm in length. If you think your hair isn't long enough you should tell the collection agent or the GMC health examiner before your appointment.

If you don't have enough head hair to be tested, you may be asked to provide body hair or fingernail clippings instead. The collector will explain if this is necessary.

If you are concerned about giving a hair or blood sample, please let us know as soon as possible.

Making an appointment

It's important that you attend an appointment as soon as possible to avoid any delays in your assessment.

A Cansford representative will contact you directly to arrange an appointment and explain the testing process, usually by phone. They will then email you to confirm the appointment details. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions about what to expect.

Cansford will usually arrange appointments at your home. But they can also visit you at your place of work or another agreed location.

Before your appointment

- Don't cut your head or body hair. If your hair is too short there might not be enough for testing, so it will need to be repeated at a later date.
- Don't bleach, dye or chemically treat your hair. This might affect the samples, meaning testing may have to be repeated.
- If you're giving a blood sample, it's recommended that you drink 1.5 litres of water in the two hours before your appointment, to make the collection more comfortable for you.

What will happen at the appointment?

You will be asked to bring photo ID along to the appointment.

The collection agent will explain what will happen, ask for your verbal consent and take the sample and arrange for it to be sent for laboratory tests.

What happens next?

The two health examiners will review the test results when they are available. If the test results are available before the examiners see you they will discuss them with you at the appointment. They will use these results, as well as the information from their examination, to produce a report and reach an opinion on your fitness to practise. They might sometimes suggest that we carry out further tests, but we will let you know if this is necessary.

We will disclose the reports to you, as well as the test results.

Your Investigation Officer or Assistant may be able to answer some of your questions about testing but please bear in mind that they are not experts in chemical testing. They may need to seek advice before responding or direct you to a different source.