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Psychemedics Insights: 2026 Annual Report

Protecting Today's Workforce: Trends, Threats, and the Critical Role of Hair Testing

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Executive Summary

The 2026 Psychemedics Annual Workforce Insights Report presents a forward-looking analysis of today's rapidly evolving drug landscape, one shaped not only by rising substance use but by unprecedented potency, increasingly complex synthetic compounds, and expanding legalization trends. Leveraging the industry's largest and most advanced database of hair testing results, Psychemedics analyzed extensive drug use patterns across 2025 to identify the behaviors, risks, and emerging threats most affecting the workforce.

This year's insights reveal a continued shift toward high-potency and poly-substance drug use, driven by a surge in synthetics, expanded access to concentrated THC products, and the spread of counterfeit pills containing fentanyl analogs and novel opioids. Employers are also confronting a rise in functional impairment substances, including prescription stimulant misuse, ketamine, and other dissociatives, used increasingly in both high-stake and safety-sensitive environments.

Across industries, several key patterns emerged:

- **Potency Escalation:** Concentrated marijuana products, increasingly powerful synthetic opioids, and ultra-pure stimulants have amplified impairment risks beyond historic norms.
- **Growth of Novel Synthetics:** 7-OH and other emerging opioids continue to enter U.S. drug markets, with detection challenges that place heightened importance on highly sensitive assays.
- **Poly-Substance Use:** Multi-drug combinations, including stimulants paired with opioids, are rising across multiple sectors, increasing the likelihood of performance impairment and severe medical events.
- **Industry Divergence:** While transportation and government sectors show improved adherence to drug-free policies, healthcare, manufacturing, and retail continue to experience elevated or rising positivity rates.
- **Legalization Momentum:** State-level policy expansions, coupled with potential federal rescheduling, are reshaping how organizations manage safety in an era where legality and impairment diverge.

With a 90-day detection window and unmatched scientific rigor, hair testing remains the most effective method for identifying lifestyle and chronic substance use, not just recent, infrequent, or accidental exposure. This extended visibility is critical as employers face mounting safety, liability, and compliance pressures in a labor environment where traditional testing methods miss the majority of high-risk users.

The 2026 Psychemedics Insights Report equips employers, policymakers, and industry leaders with the data and context needed to evaluate risk, strengthen prevention strategies, and safeguard their workforce. As drug trends continue to accelerate in complexity, Psychemedics remains dedicated to delivering the clarity, reliability, and scientific leadership needed to stay ahead of emerging threats and protect workplace safety.

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Introduction

As workforce drug use patterns accelerate in complexity, employers are navigating a safety environment unlike any seen in previous decades. Potency escalation, new drug combinations, expanded state legalization, and increasing access to "legal but impairing" substances such as Kratom are reshaping the risks organizations must manage every day. In this environment, traditional testing models are insufficient, which is why long-term, science-driven insights have never been more essential.

Psychemedics is proud to present the third annual Psychemedics Workforce Insights Report, offering a comprehensive analysis of national drug trends and their impact across key industries. This year's report reflects a workforce landscape marked by rising poly-substance use, the spread of highly potent marijuana concentrates, continued fentanyl-related risks, and increasing use of 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), the active metabolite of Kratom, which is gaining traction among working-age adults.

With the industry's largest and most advanced database of hair drug testing results, Psychemedics analyzed a vast volume of samples collected throughout 2025 from sectors including transportation, manufacturing, healthcare, retail, gaming, oil and gas, and public service. Unlike short-window tests that capture only recent use, hair testing provides a 90-day detection window, allowing employers to identify lifestyle and intermittent users who pose the greatest safety and performance risks.

This report explores emerging drug threats, shifting legalization policies, and evolving behavioral patterns that influence workplace safety. It also examines multi-year industry trends, giving employers a deeper understanding of where risks are rising, stabilizing, or declining, and why.

At Psychemedics, our mission remains unwavering: to equip organizations with the most advanced tools and intelligence to protect their workforce, support sound decision-making, and strengthen safety across every level of their operation. As substance use trends continue to evolve, we remain at the forefront of scientific innovation, policy awareness, and employer guidance.

By applying the insights in this year's report, organizations can proactively adapt their testing strategies, reinforce safety expectations, and develop resilient policies that meet the realities of today's drug landscape.

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Methodology

Psychemedics' proprietary hair testing technology is rooted in the science of drug incorporation into hair, providing highly accurate and reliable results. When drugs are consumed, parent compounds and metabolites enter the bloodstream and become embedded in the growing hair shaft, creating a stable, long-term record of use.

Our scientifically validated process enables precise detection across a wide range of substances, including opioids, fentanyl, cocaine, amphetamines, benzodiazepines, marijuana, synthetic and designer drugs, and emerging substances.

Each sample undergoes the screening process using our proprietary digest. Non-negative screen samples are then extensively washed, followed by drug extraction and confirmation to ensure unmatched sensitivity and specificity. With a 90-day detection window and resistance to tampering, Psychemedics' methodology remains the most effective tool for identifying long-term and lifestyle drug use, offering employers the clarity needed to maintain a safe and productive workforce.

How Drugs are Incorporated into Hair

The graphic below illustrates the four key stages of drug incorporation into hair:

Drug testing through hair analysis is based on well-established principles of drug metabolism and hair growth. After a substance is consumed, its parent compound and metabolites circulate through the bloodstream and are deposited into the hair follicle. As the hair continues to grow, these compounds become permanently embedded in the hair shaft.

Because this incorporation occurs from within the body, rather than from external contamination, it creates a stable, long-term record of drug use. This makes hair testing one of the most reliable, tamper-resistant, and scientifically validated methods for detecting patterns of substance use over time.

This process allows hair testing to identify long-term patterns of use rather than isolated or recent exposure, providing a more complete and reliable view of substance use behavior.

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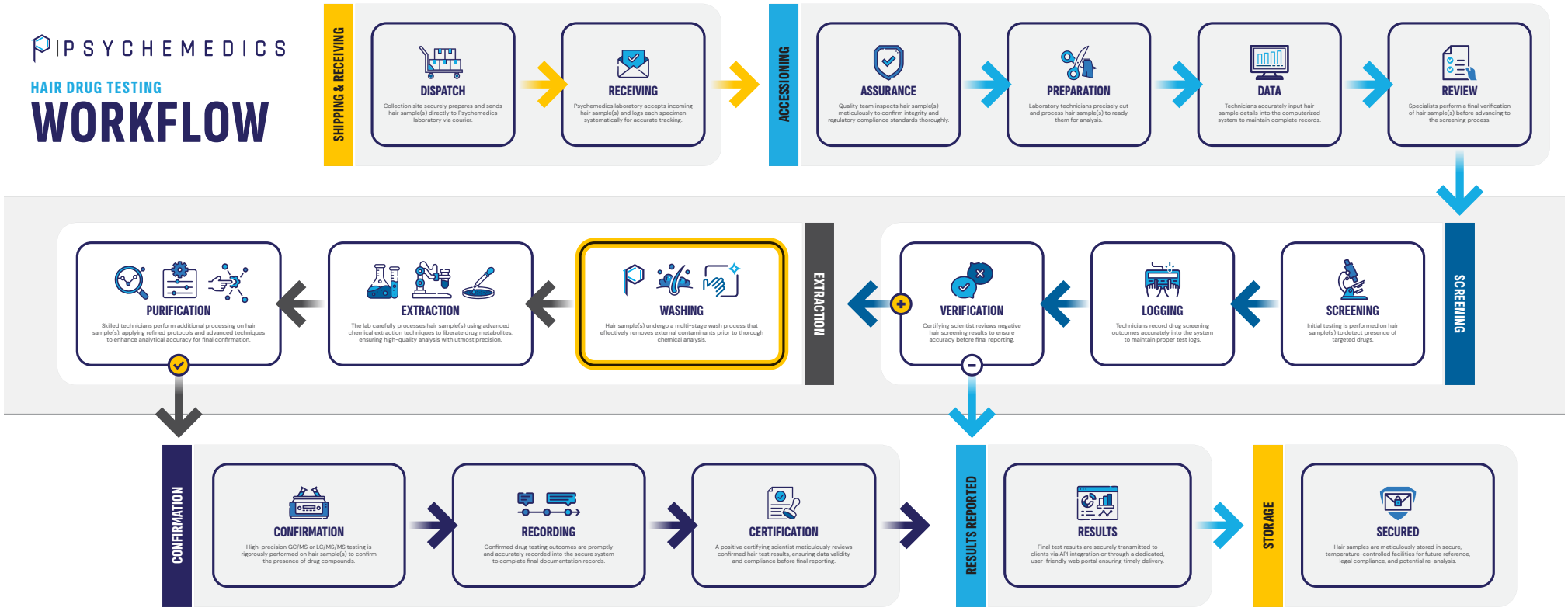
How Hair Samples Are Analyzed at Psychemedics

Once a hair sample arrives at Psychemedics, it enters a rigorously controlled, multi-step process designed to deliver the most accurate and reliable drug detection available. Our proprietary technology and scientific methods ensure unmatched sensitivity, consistency, and defensibility across every stage of testing.

The workflow below illustrates the full Psychemedics Hair Drug Testing process, from secure intake and sample preparation to advanced screening, confirmation testing, quality review, and final reporting.

The graphic below outlines the complete Psychemedics Hair Drug Testing Workflow.



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Scientific Validity and Reliability

Psychemedics' patented process delivers the highest level of accuracy and sensitivity in hair drug testing, consistently outperforming traditional short-window screening methods. Every aspect of our process is designed to ensure scientifically sound, defensible, and actionable results.

- **Extended Detection Window:** Hair testing identifies drug use for up to 90 days, far longer than urine (1-7 days) or oral fluid (24-48 hours), providing a clearer picture of sustained or lifestyle use.
- **Difficult to Cheat:** Because drug incorporation occurs internally, hair testing cannot be easily diluted, substituted, or tampered with.
- **Strict Quality Controls:** Each sample follows a highly controlled chain-of-custody and undergoes multiple verification steps to ensure accuracy and integrity.
- **Legally Defensible:** Psychemedics results are court-admissible and aligned with industry best practices, making them a trusted standard for employers, government agencies, and law enforcement.

By leveraging Psychemedics' scientifically validated methodology, organizations gain deeper insight into workforce drug use patterns, supporting stronger hiring decisions, enhanced workplace safety, and long-term risk reduction.

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Key Findings

Overall Positive Rate: 8.1% in 2025
The overall workforce positive rate in 2025 was 8.1%, reinforcing the consistent and measurable presence of drug use across industries. While slightly moderated from prior peaks, positivity remains embedded across workforce segments, particularly in safety-sensitive roles.

Healthcare Emerges as the Most Concerning Outlier (20.2%)
Healthcare recorded the highest positivity rate of any industry analyzed and reached a five-year high in 2025. At 20.2%, the sector significantly exceeds its five-year average (15.2%), signaling elevated risk in environments responsible for direct patient care and medication management.

Manufacturing Remains Elevated (12.4%)
Manufacturing continues to report double-digit positivity rates, reflecting persistent exposure to stimulants, marijuana, and opioids in industrial and operational settings. Although slightly down from 2024's peak, rates remain materially above early five-year levels.

Transportation Shows Improvement, But Risk Persists
Rail (9.0%) and Trucking (5.3%) both declined from their 2022 highs, likely reflecting stronger enforcement and broader adoption of hair testing. However, positivity rates remain meaningful in sectors where impairment carries catastrophic safety implications.

Industry Divergence Is Increasing
While Oil & Gas (4.1%) and Retail (5.5%) show stabilization or decline, Government (6.6%) experienced an uptick in 2025, and Healthcare continues to trend upward. The data indicates that risk is no longer moving uniformly across sectors, requiring industry-specific strategies.

Potency Escalation Is Amplifying Impairment Risk
High-potency THC concentrates, ultra-pure stimulants, and synthetic opioids have fundamentally changed the severity profile of substance use. Today's drugs are stronger, faster-acting, and more unpredictable than those seen a decade ago.

Rise of "Legal but Impairing" Substances
Kratom and its active metabolite 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), along with Delta-8 and Delta-10 THC products, are increasingly used by working-age adults. Often marketed as legal or natural, these substances can produce opioid-like or intoxicating effects that directly impact safety-sensitive performance.

Poly-Substance Use Is Growing
Multi-drug combinations, including stimulants paired with opioids or marijuana, are increasingly detected. Poly-substance use raises the likelihood of severe impairment, unpredictable behavior, and serious medical events in the workplace.

Legalization Complexity Continues to Expand
With nearly half the states permitting recreational cannabis and approximately 40 allowing medical use, employers face a widening gap between legality and impairment. Federal rescheduling discussions further complicate policy decisions, underscoring the need for safety-first frameworks.

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Current Drug Trends

The most disruptive shifts in today's drug landscape are increasingly coming from "legal" or semi-regulated substances, products that sit in regulatory gray areas but still create meaningful impairment and safety risk in the workplace. Two of the fastest-moving areas are Kratom/7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) and hemp-derived cannabinoids such as Delta-8 and Delta-10 THC.

7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) and Kratom

Kratom, a plant-derived product sold in powders, capsules, drinks, and "energy" shots, has moved from niche to mainstream availability in gas stations, vape shops, and online. Recent analyses suggest that millions of U.S. adults have used Kratom, often for self-managed pain, mood, or energy, rather than under medical supervision.

The concern for employers is not just Kratom leaf itself, but 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a highly potent metabolite and added ingredient in some commercial products:

- The FDA repeatedly warned that there are no approved medical uses for Kratom or 7-OH and that they carry risks including liver toxicity, seizures, substance use disorder, and death, particularly when combined with other drugs.
- In 2025, the FDA issued warning letters and moved to restrict products containing concentrated 7-OH, stating that these formulations do not meet safety standards and are being sold as unapproved drugs or adulterated supplements.
- U.S. Poison Control Centers have reported a sharp increase in cases involving Kratom and 7-OH. By mid-2025, reported Kratom exposures had already exceeded the total for all of 2024, with over a third of 7-OH only cases resulting in serious medical outcomes and most requiring treatment in a healthcare facility.

Clinical reports and state health alerts describe opioid-like effects (sedation, respiratory depression), dependence, withdrawal syndromes, and in sever cases, coma.

For employers, this means:

- Workers may be using Kratom or 7-OH products under the assumption that they are "natural" or "legal," while still experiencing opioid-type impairment.
- Use often occurs in safety-sensitive and high-stress roles, where self-medication for pain, anxiety, or fatigue is common, raising the risk of on-the-job incidents.
- Because these products are sold outside traditional healthcare channels, there is little dosing standardization, which increases the unpredictability of effects.

Delta-8 and Delta-10 THC: "Legal" Cannabinoids, Real Impairment

A second major trend is the rapid spread of hemp-derived cannabinoids, including Delta-8 and Delta-10 THC. These compounds are often marketed as milder or legal alternatives to Delta-9 THC, but they are psychoactive and can produce intoxication and impairment similar to traditional cannabis.

Key Developments:

- A 2018 federal Farm Bill created a threshold for Delta-9 THC in hemp, unintentionally opening a loophole that allowed high-potency Delta-8/Delta-10 products made from hemp-derived CBD. This led to a booming, largely unregulated market in gummies, vapes, beverages, and tinctures sold online and in vape shops.
- The FDA and CDC have both issued alerts noting that Delta-8 products are not evaluated or approved for any use, often mislabeled, and frequently associated with adverse events and pediatric exposure.
- National poison control data show thousands of Delta-8 exposure cases since 2021, with one analysis finding a roughly 80% increase in reported Delta-8 exposures from 2021 to 2022, heavily concentrated in the U.S. South.

From a workplace perspective:

- Delta-8 and Delta-10 products are often marketed as "hemp," "CBD-like," or "legal," leading some employees to underestimate their psychoactive effects and use them before or during work.
- Safety experts emphasize that these products can impair judgment, reaction time, and coordination, particularly concerning in transportation, manufacturing, construction, and other safety-sensitive environments.
- A patchwork of state laws and ongoing federal debate about closing the hemp loophole has created policy confusion for employers who must manage impairment risk while regulations remain in flux.

Implications for Employers and Testing Programs

Together, 7-OH/Kratom and Delta-8/Delta-10 THC illustrate a broader trend: impairment is increasingly driven by substances that do not fit neatly into traditional categories of "illegal drugs" but are readily accessible, heavily marketed, and often misunderstood by employees.

For employers, this means:

- Policies must speak to impairment and safety, not just legality.
- Education efforts should address "natural," "herbal," and hemp-derived products explicitly, clarifying that these substances can still affect performance and safety.
- Testing strategies should prioritize methods capable of detecting long-term and lifestyle use patterns, not just short-window exposure.

With its 90-day detection window and high sensitivity to a broad range of substances, hair testing is uniquely positioned to capture sustained use of these emerging products, helping organizations identify hidden risk and protect workplace safety more effectively than short-window testing alone.

Legislation Landscape

As of late 2025, the legal landscape surrounding marijuana in the United States continues to evolve, creating a widening gap between legal status and workplace safety obligations.

State-Level Legalization

- **Adult-Use (Recreational):** Recreational (adult-use) cannabis is now legal in 24 states plus Washington D.C., with several territories also permitting adult-use possession.
- **Medical Use:** Medical cannabis has become the norm rather than the exception: approximately 40 states and Washington D.C. now allow medical use of cannabis products under state law.

Recent changes include additional states authorizing or expanding medical programs (for example, Nebraska and Kentucky joining the medical cannabis map, and Texas moving to broaden its limited medical program to include chronic pain).

At the same time, some states remain resistant to full legalization. In North Dakota, a 2024 adult-use legalization measure narrowly failed at the ballot. In Florida, a recreational initiative failed to reach the 60% threshold needed for passage, and legislators have since tightened rules around future ballot measures, making additional statewide legalization efforts more difficult.

The result is a patchwork system in which employees may live, commute, or work across jurisdictions with vastly different rules on possession, use, and retail access.

Federal-Level Legalization

At the federal level, cannabis remains a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substances Act. However, the policy landscape is in flux:

- In 2023, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) formally recommended that cannabis be moved from Schedule I to Schedule III based on updated scientific and medical review.
- In May 2024, the Department of Justice and DEA issues a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to reschedule marijuana to Schedule III, triggering formal hearings in 2025.
- As of December 2025, no final action has been taken: the rescheduling process is still pending, and Congress retains the authority to modify cannabis' status legislatively.

Federal courts have also affirmed that, despite widespread state-level legislation, the federal prohibition remains valid. In 2025, a federal appeals court upheld the Controlled

Substances Act against a challenge from state-licensed cannabis businesses, reinforcing the ongoing conflict between federal law and state markets.

What This Means for Employers

For employers, the current environment presents three realities:

- **Legal ≠ Safe or Non-Impairing:** Even in fully legal states, cannabis (including high-potency products and hemp-derived THC variants) can impair judgment, reaction time, and performance, particularly in safety-sensitive roles.
- **Policies Must Be Location-Aware but Safety-First:** Multi-state employers must navigate differing state rules on off-duty use, disability accommodations, and testing limitations, while still protecting employees, customers, and the public. Clear, well-communicated policies focused on impairment and safety, not just legality, are essential.
- **Robust Testing Remains Critical:** As legalization expands and product potency increases, short-window tests (urine, oral fluid) are often insufficient to identify lifestyle or chronic use.

  With its 90-day detection window and resistance to tampering, hair testing provides the most reliable view of long-term use patterns, helping organizations align their policies with real-world risk rather than legal labels alone.

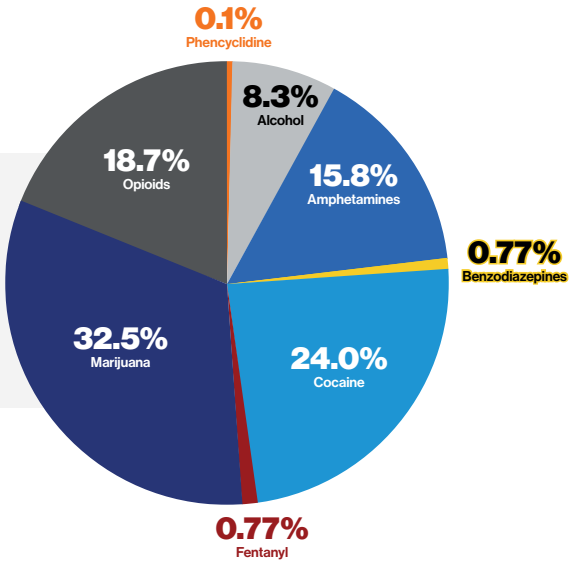
In this evolving legalization landscape, Psychemedics continues to support employers with scientifically rigorous testing, policy guidance, and workforce insights that bridge the gap between changing laws and unchanging safety responsibilities.

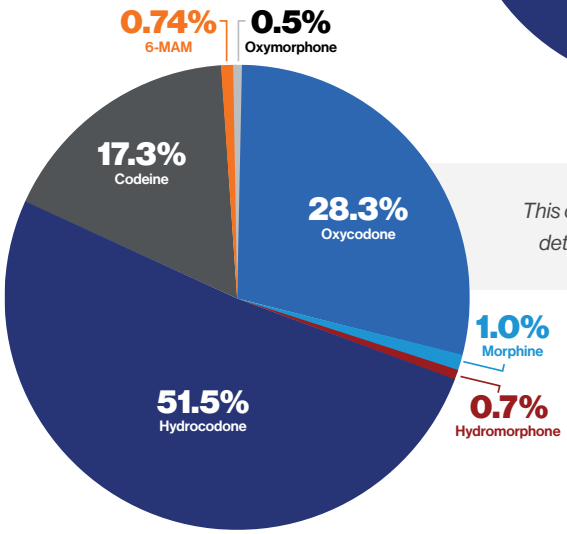
2025 Positive Rate for Drugs Tested

Overall Positive Rate:
8.1%

Distribution of Positives by Drug Class

This chart represents the composition of the overall positive rate in each drug class for which was tested.





This chart represents analytes present and detected during the screen for Opioids.

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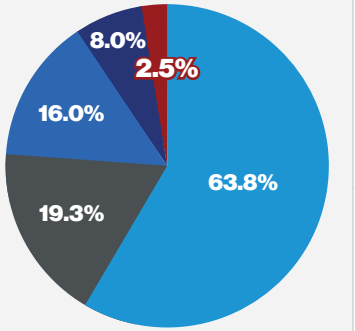
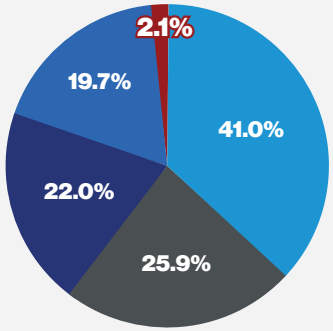
2025 Industry Drug Trends

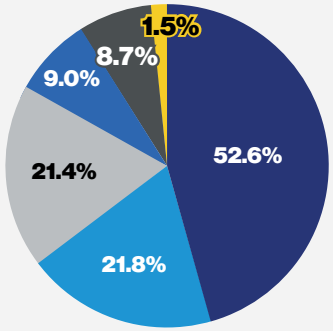
Food & Beverage
6.4%
Overall Positive Rate



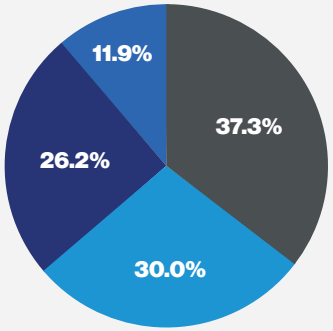
Gaming & Lodging
8.0%
Overall Positive Rate



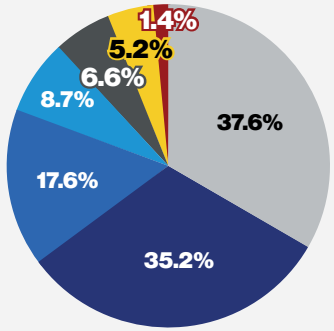
Government
6.6%
Overall Positive Rate



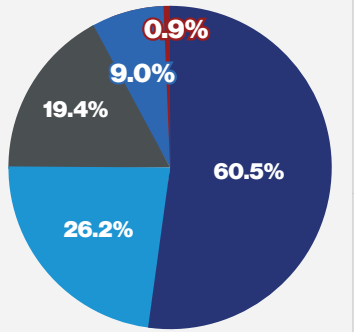
Oil & Gas
4.1%
Overall Positive Rate



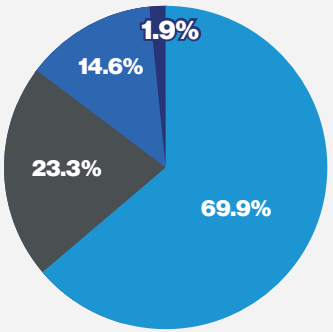
Healthcare
20.2%
Overall Positive Rate



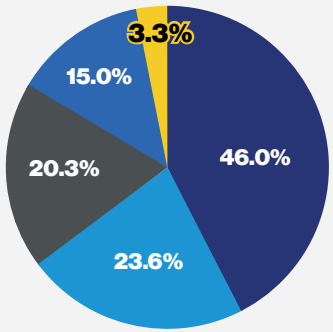
Manufacturing
12.4%
Overall Positive Rate



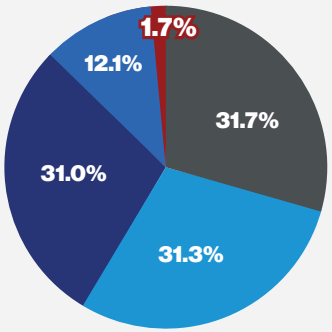
Retail
5.5%
Overall Positive Rate



Transportation | Rail
9.0%
Overall Positive Rate



Transportation | Trucking
6.3%
Overall Positive Rate



- Opioids
- Cocaine
- Amphetamines
- Marijuana
- Alcohol
- Fentanyl
- Benzodiazepines

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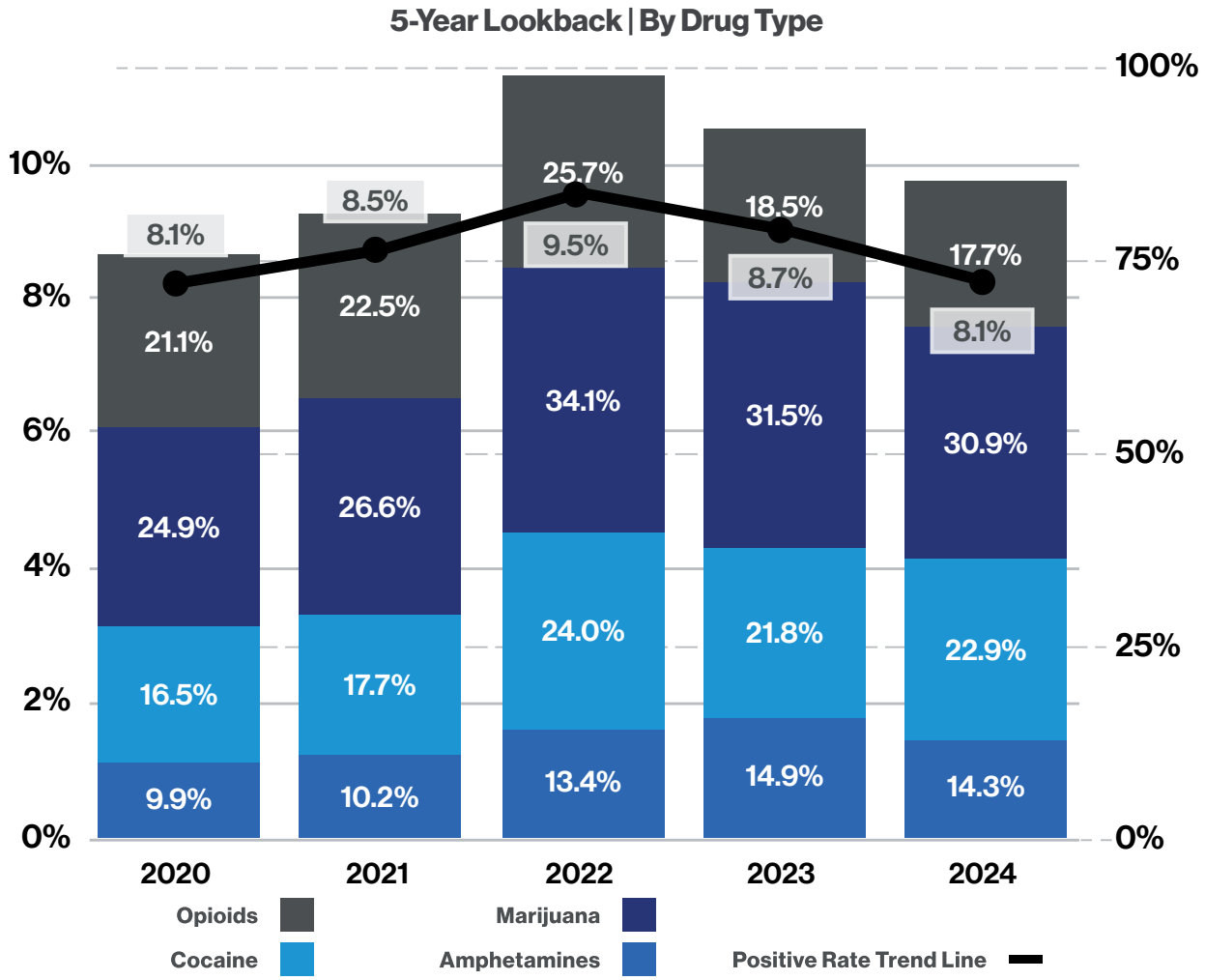
5-Year Lookback | Trends & Patterns

Understanding trends reinforces the importance of ongoing drug testing, especially in safety-sensitive industries where impairment poses a significant risk. Hair testing remains a critical tool for identifying long-term drug use and ensuring workplace safety.



The "y" axis on the chart represents % Positive Results (Total Number of Positives / Total Processed Volume). The trend line spanning all bars in the chart represents overall percentage of positive results year-over-year.

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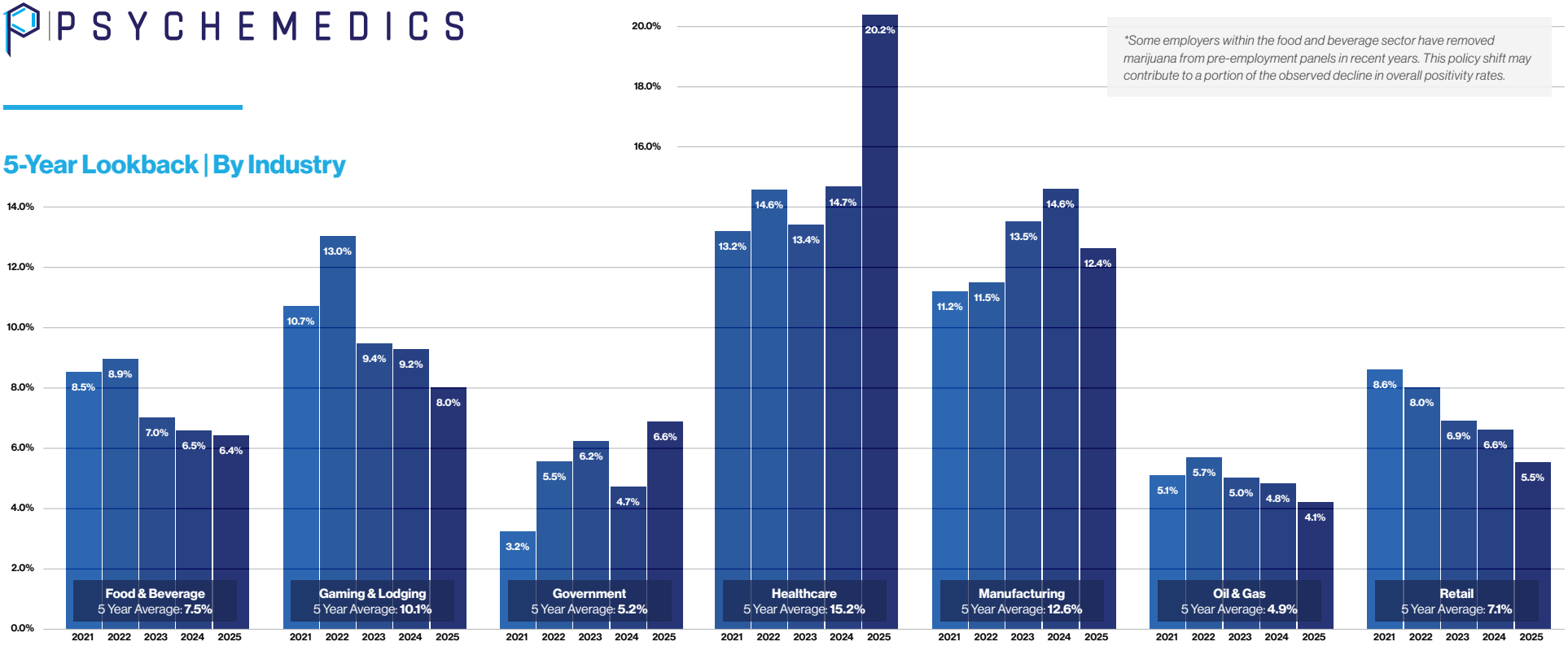
5-Year Lookback | By Industry



*Some employers within the food and beverage sector have removed marijuana from pre-employment panels in recent years. This policy shift may contribute to a portion of the observed decline in overall positivity rates.

A five-year view of hair testing positivity rates across major workforce segments reveals both encouraging stabilization in some industries and emerging risk signals in others. While several sectors show downward movement from pandemic-era highs, 2025 data indicates that drug use remains persistent, and in certain cases, intensifying within safety-sensitive environments.

- ***Healthcare (20.2% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 15.2%)*** continues to demonstrate the highest positivity rate across all industries, and in 2025, it reached a five-year high of 20.2%. This marks a significant increase over both 2024 (14.7%) and the five-year average. The upward trajectory raises serious concerns for a sector responsible for patient safety, medication management, and critical care decision-making. Workforce strain, burnout, and access to controlled substances remain contributing risk factors.
- ***Manufacturing (12.4% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 12.6%)*** has remained relatively stable over five years, though volatility is evident. After peaking in 2024 (14.6%), positivity declines in 2025 but remains elevated compared to 2021 levels. Given the safety-sensitive nature of industrial operations, even moderate positivity rates carry operational and liability implications.
- ***Gaming & Lodging (8.0% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 10.1%)*** After reaching a high of 13.0% in 2022, this sector has shown steady improvement over the past three years. While trending downward, current levels remain above pre-2022 norms, indicating ongoing workforce risk in hospitality-driven environments.
- ***Food & Beverage (6.4% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 7.5%)*** continues its gradual downward trend since 2022. While improving, positivity remains notable in roles tied to food safety, heavy equipment, and distribution logistics.*
- ***Retail (5.5% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 7.1%)*** demonstrates one of the clearest downward trajectories over five years. However, shrink, workplace violence, and safety incidents continues to correlate with substance use in frontline environments.
- ***Government (6.6% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 5.2%)*** saw an uptick in 2025 following volatility over the prior three years. The increase above the five-year average may reflect expanded testing pools, policy shifts, or increased detection through more comprehensive methods such as hair testing.

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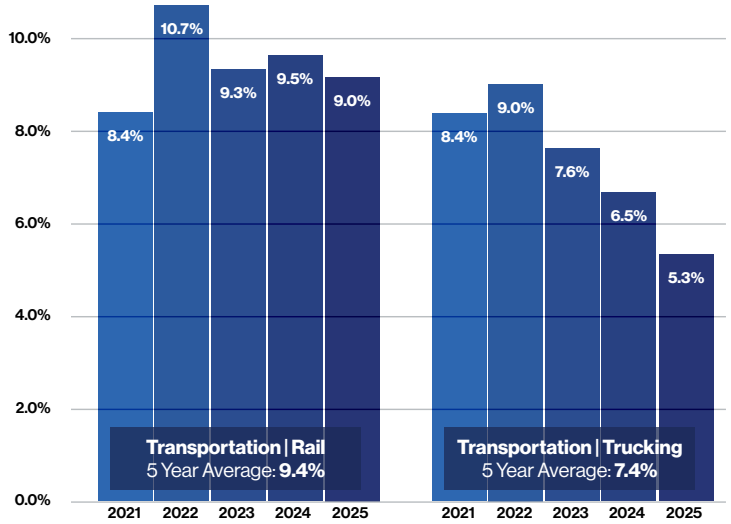
5-Year Lookback | By Industry

- ***Oil & Gas (4.1% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 4.9%)*** remains the most stable industry in the dataset, with positivity consistently hovering near or below its five-year average. Long-standing zero-tolerance policies and strong compliance frameworks likely contribute to this steadiness.
- ***Transportation Rail (9.0% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 9.4%)*** | ***Transportation Trucking (5.3% in 2025 | 5-Year Average: 7.4%)*** Rail remains consistent with its five-year trend, while Trucking shows a continued decline from its 2022 peak (9.0%). This improvement likely reflects heightened enforcement efforts, broader adoption of hair testing, and ongoing advocacy for stronger federal safety standards. However, positivity rates remain material in an industry where impairment can have catastrophic consequences.



Strategic Observations

1

Healthcare is the most concerning outlier.

The sharp rise to 20.2% represents a material workforce safety issue in a sector where impairment directly impacts patient outcomes.

2

Transportation improvement reflects enforcement, not elimination.

Declines in trucking positivity rates are encouraging, but must be viewed in context. Drug use remains present and detectable at meaningful levels.

3

Post-2022 normalization is uneven.

While several industries peaked in 2022 and have since moderated, not all sectors have returned to pre-2022 baselines.

4

Volatility underscores the value of longitudinal testing.

Hair testing's extended detection window provides clarity into long-term use patterns, offering employers insight that short-term testing methods may miss.

Why This Matters

Across industries, the five-year trend confirms a consistent truth: substance use remains embedded within segments of the workforce, even as enforcement efforts evolve. Short-term declines should not be mistaken for systemic resolution.

For safety-sensitive industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, oil and gas, transportation, and government, comprehensive, long-window testing methods are critical for identifying patterns of use that impact performance, safety, and liability exposure.

Hair testing is particularly effective in pre-employment screening, where it helps organizations identify sustained or lifestyle drug use before an individual enters the workforce. By detecting patterns of use over an extended period, hair testing enables employers to address potential risks before a driver gets behind the wheel, an operator enters a facility, or an employee begins work in an office or safety-sensitive environment.

Hair testing continues to serve as a foundational tool in workforce risk mitigation, providing a broader, more accurate picture of drug use behavior over time.

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Hair Testing: Benefits and Advantages

Hair testing for drug use offers several key benefits and advantages over other testing methods such as urine or blood tests. In this section, we will delve into the details of these benefits and explain why hair testing is considered a superior method for detecting drug use in the workplace.

Longer Detection Window: One of the most significant advantages of hair testing is its longer detection window compared to other methods. While urine tests can typically detect drug use within the past few days, hair testing can detect drug use over a much longer period, typically 90 days or even longer depending on the length of the hair sample. This longer detection window provides a more comprehensive view of an individual's drug use history, making it more difficult for individuals to conceal recent drug use.

Accuracy: Hair testing is known for its high level of accuracy. The process of drug incorporation into the hair is well understood, and the testing methods are highly sensitive and specific. The accuracy of hair testing makes it a reliable tool for employers seeking to maintain a drug-free workplace.

Non-Invasive: Unlike blood tests, which require a needle stick, or urine tests, which require the collection of a urine sample, hair testing is non-invasive and easy to administer. A small sample of hair, typically taken from the scalp, is all that is needed for the test. This makes hair testing a more comfortable and convenient option for both employers and employees.

Deterrent Effect: The knowledge that hair testing can detect drug use over a long period can act as a deterrent for individuals considering using drugs. Knowing that drug use could be detected months after the fact may discourage individuals from engaging in drug use in the first place, leading to a safer and more productive workplace.

Difficult to Cheat: Hair testing is difficult to cheat. While it is possible to adulterate urine samples or use masking agents to try to hide drug use, these methods are much less effective against hair testing. The structure of hair makes it difficult to tamper with, and attempts to do so are usually easily detected by the testing lab.

Comprehensive Testing: Hair testing can detect a wide range of drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, and more. This comprehensive testing capability makes hair testing a versatile tool for employers looking to screen for multiple drugs simultaneously.

Cost-Effective: While hair testing may initially seem more expensive than other testing methods, such as urine testing, it can actually be more cost-effective in the long run. Because hair testing has a longer detection window, employers may be able to conduct fewer tests over time, saving money on testing costs.

Hair testing offers a range of benefits and advantages that make it a superior method for detecting drug use in the workplace. Its longer detection window, high level of accuracy, non-invasiveness, and deterrent effect make it an attractive option for employers seeking to maintain a safe and drug-free workplace.

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Why Psychemedics?

Full FDA Clearance

FDA Clearance: We are one of the only labs to have FDA clearances for all five drug classes for both head and body hair.

Accurate & Reliable Results

In side-by-side evaluations, **6-14 times** as many drug users were accurately identified with the Psychemedics hair test vs urinalysis.

Environmental Contamination

We have the most extensive/effective wash procedure to remove external contaminants from the hair.

Difficult to Cheat

Our test cannot be circumvented by common tactics that might compromise other tests.

Rapid Results

Our hair drug testing offers the fastest turnaround time in the industry. Over 93% of results are returned in one day.

Smallest Hair Sample Required

Psychemedics needs the least hair in the industry, with other labs needing 2-3 times more for collection.

Conclusion

The 2026 Psychemedics Workforce Insights Report confirms what many employers are already experiencing firsthand: today's drug landscape is more complex, more potent, and more operationally disruptive than at any point in the past decade.

While certain industries have shown encouraging stabilization since the 2022 peak, the broader five-year view makes one thing clear, substance use has not disappeared. It has evolved. Higher-potency marijuana concentrates, synthetic opioids, fentanyl analogs, Kratom-derived 7-OH-Mitragynine products, hemp-derived THC variants, and rising poly-substance combinations are reshaping impairment risk across the workforce. In some sectors, particularly healthcare, risk indicators are accelerating rather than declining.

At the same time, momentum toward legalization and regulatory gray areas continues to blur the line between what is legal and what is safe. Employers are increasingly tasked with navigating a patchwork of state laws, potential federal rescheduling, and merging "legal but impairing" products, all while maintaining an unwavering commitment to safety, compliance, and operational integrity.

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The data in the report underscores several critical realities:

- Potency escalation is amplifying impairment risk beyond historic norms.
- Poly-substance use is increasing the severity and unpredictability of safety incidents.
- Industry divergence requires sector-specific strategies rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.
- Short-window testing alone is insufficient to identify lifestyle and intermittent users who pose the greatest long-term risk.

In this environment, visibility is everything.

With its scientifically validated 90-day detection window, resistance to tampering, and unmatched sensitivity, hair testing remains the most comprehensive and defensible method for identifying sustained patterns of drug use. It provides employers with clarity that aligns with real-world risk, not just recent exposure.

As organizations look at 2026 and beyond, a proactive strategy will matter more than a reactive policy. Employers who ground their programs in science, data and long-term detection will be better positioned to reduce incidents, protect their workforce, and navigate evolving legal frameworks with confidence.

Psychemedics remains committed to advancing scientific rigor, expanding detection capabilities, and equipping employers with the intelligence needed to respond to an increasingly complex drug environment. Our mission is unchanged: to help organizations create safer workplaces, make sound decisions, and stay ahead of emerging threats.

The landscape may be evolving, but the responsibility to protect people, operations, and communities remains constant.

As substance use trends continue to shift and new synthetic drugs emerge, organizations must take a proactive approach to workplace drug testing. By leveraging the scientific accuracy and long-term detection capabilities of hair testing, employers can protect their workforce, maintain compliance with evolving regulations, and foster a safer, more productive work environment. Psychemedics remains committed to providing cutting-edge drug testing solutions, helping businesses stay ahead of the evolving drug landscape while ensuring workplace safety and integrity.

About Psychemedics

Psychemedics Corporation is a leading global provider of innovative hair testing for drugs of abuse. With over 30 years of experience, Psychemedics has pioneered the science of hair testing and provides clients with the most accurate and reliable hair drug test results in the industry. The company's patented technology is used by thousands of companies worldwide to screen applicants and employees for drug use, helping to create safer and more productive workplaces.

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Drug Glossary

Amphetamines. Amphetamines are stimulant drugs that increase activity in the central nervous system. They are commonly used to treat conditions like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy. Amphetamines can also be abused for their euphoric effects and to increase alertness and energy.

Alcohol. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that is widely consumed for recreational and social purposes. It affects cognitive and motor functions, leading to impaired judgment, coordination, and reaction time. Chronic alcohol use can contribute to addiction, liver disease, cardiovascular issues, and mental health disorders. In workplace settings, alcohol impairment can lead to safety risks, decreased productivity, and increased absenteeism.

Benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines are a class of psychoactive drugs used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and seizures. They work by enhancing the effects of the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the brain, leading to sedative and calming effects. Benzodiazepines are prescribed medically but can also be misused for their sedative effects.

Cocaine. Cocaine is a powerful stimulant drug derived from the cocoa plant. It is commonly found in the form of white powder, which is usually snorted, rubbed into the gums, or dissolved and injected. Cocaine is known for its short-lived but intense euphoric effects.

Fentanyl. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid more potent than morphine. It is used medically for pain relief, especially for severe pain such as that experienced by cancer patients. Fentanyl is also used illicitly and is a major contributor to the opioid epidemic due to its potency and high risk of overdose.

Marijuana. Marijuana, also known as cannabis, is a psychoactive drug derived from the cannabis plant. It contains various psychoactive compounds, with delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) being the most well-known and studied. Marijuana is typically consumed by smoking, vaporizing, or ingesting.

Phencyclidine (PCP). Phencyclidine (PCP) is a dissociative drug originally developed as an anesthetic. It is now misused for its hallucinogenic effects. PCP can induce hallucinations, distorted perceptions of reality, and feelings of detachment from oneself and one's surroundings.

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Opioids. Opioids are a class of drugs derived from the opium poppy plant or synthetically produced. They include drugs such as morphine, heroin, and codeine. Opioids are known for their pain-relieving properties and are often used medically for pain management.

6-MAM. 6-MAM is a metabolite of heroin, serving as a key biomarker for heroin use. It is rapidly produced in the body after heroin consumption before further breaking down into morphine. Due to its short half-life, detecting 6-MAM in drug testing confirms recent heroin use. Heroin is a highly addictive opioid that poses serious health risks, including respiratory depression, overdose, and death.

Codeine. Codeine is a prescription opioid used to treat mild to moderate pain and as a cough suppressant. It is metabolized in the body into morphine, contributing to its pain-relieving effects. While it is considered less potent than other opioids, prolonged use can lead to dependency, respiratory depression, and misuse. Codeine is sometimes combined with other medications, such as acetaminophen or promethazine, which can increase its risks when misused.

Hydrocodone. Hydrocodone is a semi-synthetic opioid used to manage moderate to severe pain. Often combined with acetaminophen or ibuprofen, it is one of the most commonly prescribed opioids in the United States. Hydrocodone can produce euphoria, leading to misuse and addiction. Long-term use can result in physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms, contributing to the ongoing opioid crisis.

Hydromorphone. Hydromorphone is a potent opioid analgesic prescribed for severe pain management, particularly in cases where other pain medications are ineffective. It is significantly more powerful than morphine and has a high potential for addiction and abuse. Hydromorphone use can cause respiratory depression, drowsiness, and cognitive impairment, making it a serious concern for workplace safety.

Morphine. Morphine is a naturally occurring opioid used for the treatment of moderate to severe pain, especially in post-surgical and palliative care settings. It is highly effective but carries a significant risk of dependence and abuse. Morphine's effects include pain relief, sedation, and respiratory depression, with overdose potentially leading to fatal respiratory failure.

Oxymorphone. Oxymorphone is a powerful opioid analgesic used for managing severe pain in patients who require long-term opioid treatment. It has a high risk of addiction and abuse, particularly due to its potent effects. Misuse of oxymorphone can lead to respiratory depression, overdose, and fatal consequences, making it a target for regulatory control and monitoring in drug testing programs.

Oxycodone. Oxycodone is a widely used prescription opioid for moderate to severe pain relief. It is available in immediate-release and extended-release formulations, with brand names such as OxyContin and Percocet. Oxycodone's euphoric effects contribute to its high abuse potential, leading to significant addiction rates and overdose risks. It remains a key focus in opioid crisis interventions and workplace drug screening programs.

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