



What Hair Testing Reveals About Substance Use in Fraternity Life

New data uncovers the drug trends, behavioral risks, and emerging threats shaping today's fraternity communities.



Helping Fraternities Identify Substance Use Risk Before It Becomes a Crisis

Fraternity drug testing helps organizations reduce safety, reputational, legal, behavioral, and student well-being risks before problems escalate. As chapters face greater scrutiny from universities, national organizations, insurers, alumni boards, and parents, traditional prevention efforts may not provide enough visibility. Because substance use is often linked to hazing incidents, sexual misconduct, serious injuries, and fatalities, identifying patterns of drug use early can help improve member safety, accountability, and chapter culture.

This whitepaper examines how hair testing helps fraternity organizations identify sustained drug use, support early intervention, and reduce chapter risk. It explains the limits of short-window testing, shows why patterns of use may be more meaningful than isolated recent use, and positions hair testing as a proactive strategy for building safer, healthier fraternity communities.

Executive Summary

Fraternities face increasing pressure to create safer environments while maintaining strong membership experiences. Universities, national organizations, insurers, and alumni boards are all demanding greater accountability around substance use, risk management, and student safety.

Recent Psychemedics data reveals a concerning reality:

- Nearly 3 in 10 fraternity samples tested positive for drugs in 2025
- Marijuana remains the dominant substance detected
- Cocaine positivity increased significantly compared to prior years
- Poly-drug use continues to be present
- Emerging synthetic substances and counterfeit pills create risks that often go undetected until tragedy occurs

At the same time, broader educational testing data show substance use remains a persistent challenge among students nationwide, despite overall improvements in positivity rates. Hair testing provides fraternity leaders with a unique opportunity to identify repeated drug use, support early intervention efforts, and reduce risk before incidents occur.

The Modern Fraternity Challenge

Today's fraternity leaders operate in a very different environment than they did a decade ago. Three major trends are reshaping campus risk:



1. High-Potency Cannabis

Marijuana remains the most commonly detected substance among students. Modern cannabis products, including concentrates, vape cartridges, and edibles, contain substantially higher THC concentrations than previous generations. Research has linked these products to:

- Reduced attention and memory retention
- Impaired decision-making
- Decreased motivation
- Increased anxiety and depressive symptoms

These effects can influence both academic performance and chapter culture.



2. Cocaine's Resurgence

While marijuana receives most of the attention, cocaine is becoming a growing concern. Educational testing data shows cocaine's share of positive tests increased from 6.7% of positives in 2024 to 8.3% in 2025. Within fraternity populations specifically, cocaine represented nearly one in five positive drug findings in 2025. This trend aligns with broader national concerns regarding stimulant use among college-age populations.



3. Counterfeit Pills & Synthetic Drug Exposure

Perhaps the most serious concern is the continued proliferation of counterfeit pills. Students may unknowingly consume substances containing fentanyl or other synthetic opioids while believing they are taking legitimate prescription medications. Even a single exposure can have catastrophic consequences. Educational institutions across the country are increasingly viewing synthetic opioids as a student safety issue rather than simply a drug use issue.

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What Fraternity Testing Data Revealed in 2025

Psychemedics analyzed drug testing results from a fraternity population during 2025.

Key Findings

- Drug use was detected among a substantial segment of the fraternity population tested.
- The overwhelming majority of positive findings involved marijuana, reflecting broader trends seen across college-aged populations.
- Cocaine emerged as a notable secondary drug of concern.
- Instances of poly-substance use were identified, creating elevated safety and health risks.
- Hair testing provided visibility into long-term drug use patterns that are often missed by traditional testing methods, offering organizations an opportunity for earlier intervention and risk reduction.

The findings suggest that substance use remains a significant risk-management concern within many fraternity communities and highlight the value of prevention, education, and early intervention efforts.

By The Numbers

28%

Overall positivity rate within the analyzed fraternity population.

3.1%

Overall positivity rate across Psychemedics' broader education testing population in 2025.

9x
MORE

The fraternity positivity rate was approximately nine times higher than that observed across the broader education sector.

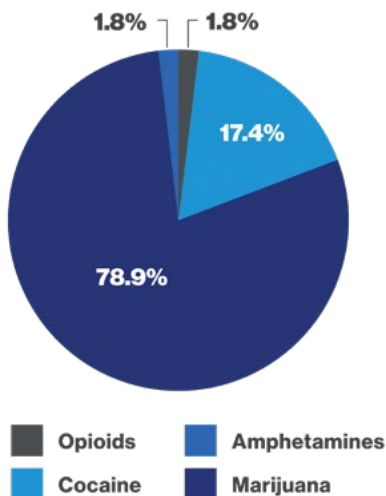
The Drugs Being Detected

Marijuana Remains the Primary Driver

Marijuana continues to dominate substance use within fraternity populations, accounting for nearly **four out of every five positive drug tests** conducted in 2025. This finding mirrors broader education-sector trends where cannabis represented the largest share of all positive results.

While marijuana is often viewed as a lower-risk substance, today's cannabis landscape is fundamentally different from what it was a decade ago. High-potency concentrates, vape cartridges, and edibles contain significantly greater levels of THC, increasing the potential for impaired judgment, reduced motivation, memory disruption, and decreased academic engagement.

For fraternity leaders, the prevalence of marijuana use highlights an important reality: the most common substance-related risks are often not dramatic incidents, but the cumulative effects on academic performance, chapter leadership, member accountability, and overall organizational culture.



Cocaine Represents a Disproportionate Risk

Although marijuana accounts for the majority of positive findings, cocaine emerged as the second most frequently detected substance and warrants heightened attention.

The fraternity population analyzed exhibited cocaine positivity rates that were more than twice those observed across Psychemedics' broader education testing population.

Unlike marijuana, cocaine is often associated with acute risk events. Its use has been linked to increased impulsivity, risk-taking behavior, impaired decision-making, cardiovascular complications, and substance dependency concerns. In social environments, these factors can contribute to conduct violations, injuries, medical emergencies, and incidents that carry significant reputational consequences for both chapters and institutions.

Compounding these concerns is the growing presence of fentanyl-contaminated illicit drugs. National public health agencies continue to warn that individuals may unknowingly consume synthetic opioids when using substances purchased through informal channels, creating potentially life-threatening consequences from a single use event.

The data suggests that while marijuana remains the most common substance detected, cocaine may represent one of the most significant risk-management challenges facing fraternity organizations today.

Poly-Drug Use: A Hidden Risk Factor

One of the most important advantages of hair testing is its ability to identify poly-drug use, individuals who test positive for multiple substances simultaneously.

In 2025, multiple fraternity members tested positive for more than one drug class, revealing patterns of substance use that would be difficult to identify through observation alone.

This distinction matters because poly-drug use often carries risks that exceed the impact of any single substance. Combining drugs can amplify impairment, increase the likelihood of accidents, produce unpredictable physiological effects, and complicate emergency medical treatment. Research has also linked poly-substance use to decreased academic engagement, behavioral challenges, and higher rates of mental health concerns.

For fraternity leaders, poly-drug use should be viewed as a risk multiplier. While a positive test identifies substance use, the presence of multiple substances may indicate a broader pattern of behavior that warrants additional attention and support.

Why Hair Testing Matters

The objective of most fraternity programs is not punishment. It's prevention.

To be effective, prevention programs must identify meaningful patterns of substance use rather than isolated instances of recent consumption. This is where hair testing provides a distinct advantage.

Hair testing offers approximately a 90-day window of detection, providing visibility into repeated or lifestyle drug use rather than simply capturing whether an individual abstained for a few days before a scheduled test.

This extended window allows organizations to identify:

- Repeated marijuana use
- Ongoing cocaine use
- Chronic stimulant misuse
- Poly-drug use patterns
- Emerging behavioral trends within a population

Because drugs become incorporated into the hair shaft as hair grows, individuals cannot simply “wait out” a testing event. The result is a more comprehensive and accurate picture of substance use behavior over time.

Psychemedics further enhances reliability through a combination of proprietary wash procedures designed to remove environmental contamination, mass spectrometry confirmation testing, and scientific review for certification. Together, these safeguards provide highly defensible results that organizations can trust when making risk-prevention decisions.

Hair testing reveals repeated substance use patterns **that short-window testing can easily miss.**

Moving From Detection to Prevention

The most effective fraternity organizations recognize that testing alone does not create safer communities. Rather, testing serves as one component of a broader prevention framework designed to reduce risk, support student well-being, and reinforce organizational values. Successful programs typically focus on three areas:



Education

Members must understand today's evolving drug landscape. High-potency cannabis products, counterfeit pills, fentanyl contamination, and increasing stimulant misuse present risks that differ significantly from those faced by previous generations of students. Ongoing education helps members make informed decisions and recognize emerging threats.



Early Intervention

The greatest value of testing is often realized before a crisis occurs. Identifying potential concerns early creates opportunities for support, counseling, accountability measures, and behavior modification before substance use contributes to academic failure, medical emergencies, disciplinary action, or legal consequences.



Culture and Accountability

Ultimately, prevention is a cultural issue. Organizations that establish clear expectations, prioritize member well-being, and consistently reinforce accountability are often best positioned to reduce substance-related incidents over the long term.

Testing cannot create culture, but it can support a culture that values safety, responsibility, and leadership.

Conclusion

The findings from this report underscore an important reality: substance use remains a significant challenge within many fraternity communities. With an overall positivity rate of 28.0%, the fraternity population analyzed demonstrated substantially higher levels of drug use than those observed across the broader education sector. Marijuana continues to account for the majority of positive findings, while elevated cocaine positivity rates and the presence of poly-drug use highlight additional areas of concern.

At the same time, the data reinforces an encouraging opportunity. When organizations have visibility into substance use patterns, they are better positioned to intervene early, educate members, strengthen accountability, and reduce risk before problems escalate.

For fraternity leaders, alumni boards, and university partners, hair testing provides more than a testing result. It provides insight that can help protect members, strengthen chapters, and foster safer, healthier communities.