Testing Alcohol and Other Substance Policy

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CONSULTATION AND DISTRIBUTION RECORD	
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CHANGE RECORD			
Date	**Author**	**Change**	**Version No.**
May 2026	Service Manager, Salus OH	Supersedes NHS Lanarkshire's Alcohol and Substance Misuse Testing Guidance and should be used in conjunction with the NHS Scotland Workforce Alcohol and Other Substances Policy.	V1
September 2026	K. Torrance	Summary added using copilot & reviewed by policies staff	1.1

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Testing Alcohol and Other Substance Policy Summary

What is this policy about?

NHS Lanarkshire wants to keep patients, staff and the public safe. It also wants to support staff struggling with alcohol or drug use.

Why is this policy important?

The policy explains what happens if concerns are raised about alcohol or substance use at work and what support is available.

Who must follow this policy?

- All NHS Lanarkshire employees
- Bank workers
- Agency workers
- Sessional workers

Your responsibilities

You must:

- Come to work fit to do your job safely.
- Allow enough time for alcohol or drugs to leave your system before work.
- Not drink alcohol or use intoxicating substances before or during work.
- Attend Occupational Health appointments when required.
- Take part in any agreed support plan.
- Speak to your manager if you are worried about a colleague.

Getting support

If alcohol or substance use is affecting your work, support is available.
Your manager can refer you to Occupational Health. Occupational Health can:

- Assess your fitness for work.
- Recommend support services.
- Advise on temporary changes to duties if needed.
- Help manage an agreed support plan.

Time off for treatment or recovery may be managed as sick leave under NHS Scotland attendance policies.

When managers have concerns

Managers may become concerned if they notice:

- Changes in work performance.
- Unusual or inappropriate behaviour.
- Mood changes.
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Signs that suggest someone may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

These signs do not always mean alcohol or substance misuse. Other health issues can cause similar symptoms.

Alcohol and drug testing

Testing may take place if:

- There is concern that someone is under the influence at work ("for-cause testing").
- An employee asks for help and agrees to a support plan.
- Random testing has been agreed as part of a support plan.

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- Testing only happens with your consent.
- Occupational Health explains the process before testing.
- You can be tested for alcohol, drugs or both.
- Testing may involve breath, saliva, urine, hair or blood samples.

Random testing
Random testing can only happen when:
- You agree to it.
- It is included in a Supportive Plan.
- Occupational Health, management and the employee all agree.

You will not receive advance notice of a random test.

Test results
Occupational Health will tell your manager whether the result is:
- Negative (no alcohol or substances detected), or
- Non-negative (further investigation may be needed).

If a result needs laboratory confirmation, management will assess the risk and decide if you can work safely.

If you refuse testing
If you refuse testing or Occupational Health appointments, NHS Lanarkshire may manage the issue through relevant workforce policies.

Managers' responsibilities
Managers should:
- Act quickly when concerns arise.
- Protect patient, staff and public safety.
- Discuss concerns sensitively and respectfully.
- Seek advice from Human Resources and Occupational Health.
- Arrange safe transport home if needed.
- Make sure staff do not drive if they may be under the influence.

Key message
NHS Lanarkshire will support staff who need help while protecting patients, staff and the public.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that it is an employer's duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of employees, as well as protecting persons who are not at work against risks to their health or safety arising out of, or in connection with, the activities of persons at work.

NHS Lanarkshire is committed to providing a safe and productive working environment for all employees and service users and supporting individuals who have an alcohol and/or substance misuse problem.

The inappropriate use of alcohol or substances can damage the health and well-being of employees and have far-reaching effects on their personal and working lives. NHS Lanarkshire recognises that employees in these circumstances need help and support.

2. AIM, PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

2.1 This policy is designed to support implementation of the NHS Scotland Alcohol and Other Substances Policy within NHS Lanarkshire.

3. SCOPE

3.1 Who is the Policy intended to Benefit or Affect?

3.1 In line with the NHS Scotland Alcohol and Other Substances Policy, this policy applies to all employees. It also applies to workers, i.e. bank, agency and sessional workers. References to employees should be taken to apply to workers unless otherwise stated.

3.2 Who are the Stakeholders

3.2.1 All directly employed staff of NHS Lanarkshire

4. PRINCIPAL CONTENT

4.1 Referral to Occupational Health

4.1 A referral can be made to Occupational Health where concerns are raised relating to inappropriate alcohol or substance use at work or impacting work.
Work is defined as attending rostered shifts, attending meetings, attending hearings or training events.

4.2 For Cause Testing

4.2.1 This type of testing may be requested, during staff members' working shifts as defined above, through involvement in a specific issue arising at work.

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For cause testing is available Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4pm.

4.2.2 Reasons for considering for-cause testing include smelling of alcohol or suspicion that the employee is under the influence of alcohol and/or substances, demonstrated through:

- Poor/changes to work performance,
- Unacceptable and/or unusual behaviours or inappropriate social interactions at work where it is suspected that alcohol and/or substance misuse may be, at least, a contributing factor.

NHS Scotland Workforce policy on Alcohol and Other Substances makes reference to:

- Appearing to be under the influence of alcohol or other substances
- Smelling of alcohol
- Physical signs like hand tremors or sweating
- Difficulty recalling instructions or handling complex tasks
- Changes in mood or behavior.

It is important to remember that these signs could also be due to other issues.

In such cases, the manager must:

- Discuss their concerns with the employee immediately.
- Inform the senior manager.
- Request the employee attend Occupational Health for testing where it is suspected they may be under the influence of alcohol and/or substances; while this is usually requested by the manager via telephone, it must be followed up immediately by a written request to the Occupational Health department so it can be included in the employee's confidential Occupational Health record.
- Send the employee home or, if appropriate, suspend them from duty pending investigation, depending on test results and when results will be available; refer to the suspension checklist within the NHS Scotland Conduct Policy to determine whether suspension is appropriate and for guidance on ensuring the employee gets home safely (including making sure they do not use their own vehicle and that safe alternative transport is arranged).
- Inform Human Resources as soon as practical and make arrangements to follow up as appropriate, in line with the NHS Scotland Workforce Policies.
- Testing can only be carried out with the staff member's informed consent.

4.3 Out of Hours for Cause Testing

4.3.1 For cause testing is not available out side of normal operating hours; as detailed in section 4.2.1

4.3.2 Managers should assess the situation and information available to determine the appropriate course of action, seek advice from the Service On-call Manager, and contact Human Resources as soon as practical to agree on interim management action and next steps.

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- If there is any immediate patient/staff/public safety concern, remove the employee from duty at once and ensure they are supervised.
- Arrange safe transport home and ensure the employee does not drive, and document the rationale and actions taken.
- Agree with the Service On-call Manager whether the employee should be sent home or suspended from duty pending investigation, in line with the NHS Scotland Conduct Policy suspension checklist.
- If testing is required, arrange for the earliest available Occupational Health appointment in-hours or, where appropriate and pre-approved, an alternative third-party provider route agreed by management/HR.
- Confirm follow-up actions and communications (including who will inform the employee of expectations for next shift) and ensure HR is updated.

4.4 Supportive Plan

4.4.1 A template Supportive Plan is available as part of the NHS Scotland Alcohol and Other Substances Policy. This should be used to identify the support and arrangements that are being put in place for an employee who admits to having an alcohol and/or substance problem. This may include an agreement for random testing. Consideration must be given to the role the employee undertakes, their shifts, the area of work, the impact on colleagues, and recommendations from Occupational Health.

4.4.2 Where random testing is agreed, this must be included in the Supportive Plan, which **must** contain:

- The staff members DOB
- An statement agreeing random testing
- The duration from the date of signing the Supportive Plan
- The type of testing required (Alcohol/Substances/Both)
- The named contacts for occupational health to liaise with when arranging appointments and sharing of results

4.4.3 The manager will complete the Supportive Plan with the staff member and supply this to Occupational Health, who will then coordinate the testing and liaise with the manager, who will provide the employee's rota in advance.

4.5 Random Testing

4.5.1 Random testing means that the employee will be subject to an alcohol or substance test without prior notification.

Random testing will take place where it is agreed with the employee, management and Occupational Health .

4.5.2 Random testing will be conducted within normal working hours (8:30am-4pm) and will take place where it is agreed with the employee, management and Occupational Health. Occupational Health will coordinate this and will link with the manager, who will provide the employee's rota in advance.

In exceptional circumstances, random testing can be arranged outside of normal hours. In this situation, an approved third party provider may carry out this testing.

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Costs for random testing will be borne by the staff member's budget holder/manager. Cost codes will need to be supplied.

4.5.3 A management referral may also be appropriate where an employee has approached their manager seeking support for a suspected or known alcohol and/or substance problem. The referral must state that the manager is referring the employee under NHS Scotland Alcohol and Other Substances Policy.

4.5.4 Where random testing is being requested, a copy of the Supportive Plan must be included with the referral with details of what is required from Occupational Health. The named contacts for Occupational Health to liaise with around testing arrangements must also be confirmed at this time. It is recommended that the manager discusses the proposed content of the Supportive Plan, with the member of staff, prior to submitting the referral to Occupational Health. The manager must provide regular updates on staff members' shift patterns for the duration of the agreed testing period.

It should be noted that random testing does not negate the need to carry out for cause testing should a need arise.

Following receipt of the referral, an assessment will be completed taking into account the following:

- Signposting the employee to relevant help and support
- The employee's fitness for normal working and where appropriate alternative duties during this period

4.5.5 It is the employee's responsibility to acknowledge that they have an alcohol and/or substance misuse problem. However, it is possible that an Occupational Health professional may believe that the employee has an alcohol or substance misuse problem and, in some circumstances, may feel that this should be conveyed to management. This is likely to be the case where there is a risk to the safety of patients, staff or the public.

When an employee requires to be absent from work, this will be regarded as sick leave in line with NHS Scotland Attendance Policy.

If an employee denies that they have an alcohol and/or substance related problem and/or refuses to attend Occupational Health, issues surrounding misconduct, attendance and/or performance will be dealt with through the appropriate NHS Scotland Workforce Policy.

4.6 Testing Procedure

4.6.1 Testing will be undertaken if an employee:

- Is suspected of being under the influence of alcohol and/or substances whilst at work,
- Admits having a problem which is affecting their work performance, or is causing work related issues, and makes this known to management.
- Where an agreed period of random testing is in place

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Testing can only be done with the employee's written consent for random testing.

4.6.2 Consent should be included as part of the Supportive Plan and will be required at each test.

4.6.3 The process will be followed whether an employee is being tested for alcohol and/or substances as part of an organised follow-up programme involving random testing or for-cause testing.

The procedure will be explained to the employee by the Occupational Health Practitioner and fully informed written consent will be sought on each occasion testing is carried out.

The employee will be informed that management will be advised of the result either being negative or non-negative. Actual results will only be shared with management if requested and with the employee's written consent.

4.7 Substance testing

4.7.1 If substance testing is to take place, a sample is required to test for the presence of substances. The employee will be informed which substances will be included in the test.

The sample to be taken will be determined by the substances being looked for and

4.7.2 the risk assessment undertaken.
These can include but not limited to:

- Urine
- Saliva
- Breath
- Hair
- Blood

The employee will be required to provide details of prescribed medications that

4.7.3 they are taking and documentary evidence to support this which will be requested and recorded prior to testing. If the testing is carried out 'for cause' and therefore the employee does not have such evidence to hand, then they will be requested to produce this as soon as is reasonably practicable.

In most testing scenarios, an immediate result can be provided and, if non-

4.7.4 negative, the sample will be sent to a certified off-site laboratory for further analysis. The employee will be asked to declare what medications they have taken over an identified period, which will be taken into account when results are analysed.

The test is undertaken in line with a chain of custody, a process where the sample

4.7.5 has been controlled throughout the entire procedure to ensure it cannot be tampered with or mixed up with other samples.

4.8 Alcohol

If alcohol testing is to be undertaken, the devices used give an immediate result for the presence of alcohol via a breath test. If a non-negative result (i.e. alcohol

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present) is revealed, the employee will be given the opportunity to provide a further breath sample after 15 minutes to ensure results are accurate.

4.9 Results

4.9.1 With the employee's consent, Occupational Health will advise the manager whether the result is negative or non-negative. In some cases the initial onsite result may require laboratory analysis and confirmation, These results will provide the final outcome, which will be shared with the manager upon receipt, subject to the staff members consent.

4.9.2 Where an initial on-site result is non-negative and laboratory confirmation is pending, the manager (with HR advice) must complete an immediate risk assessment and decide whether the employee can remain at work on amended duties under supervision, should be sent home, or should be suspended from duty pending investigation.

4.9.3 Occupational Health will provide the test outcome (negative or non-negative) and, where applicable, following laboratory confirmation. Decisions on conduct and/or performance management action sit with management in consultation with Human Resources and the relevant NHS Scotland Workforce Policies.

- If the result is negative, the manager should confirm next steps with the employee and consider any other management action indicated by the underlying concerns (e.g., conduct, performance, attendance) in line with the relevant workforce policy.
- If the result is non-negative (including pending confirmation), the manager should remove the employee from safety-critical activity immediately and agree interim action with HR advice pending final outcome.
- If the employee refuses testing or does not provide consent, the manager should manage the situation as a workplace matter and seek HR advice, following the relevant NHS Scotland Workforce Policy.

4.9.4 Occupational Health would not be considered experts in Alcohol and Substance misuse and will only be able to provide the results of the tests undertaken and fitness for work.

4.9.5 At the end of the Supportive Plan contract, Occupational Health will provide a report to the referring manager, with the member of staff's consent. No further appointments will be sent to the employee for random testing at this time. If further instances occur that require further random testing, then a new referral and Supportive Plan is required.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1.1 Employees must

- Comply with the NHS Scotland Workforce Alcohol and Other Substances Policy and this local policy, seeking clarification where required.
- Attend Occupational Health appointments when referred or requested as part of for-cause testing, assessment or agreed random testing arrangements.

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- Allow sufficient time for intoxicating substances to leave their system before reporting for work and take personal responsibility for their own safety, that of colleagues and service users.
- Not consume intoxicating substances before coming on duty, whilst on duty (including breaks) or when they may be required to attend work at short notice e.g. on-call
- Participate in the Supportive Plan where agreed .
- Inform their line manager if they have concerns over a colleague.

5.1.2 Managers must

- Assess the risk when concerns arise and take appropriate action to protect patients, staff and the public.
- Discuss concerns with the employee, manage the situation sensitively and provide appropriate support.
- Inform the senior manager where appropriate and seek advice from Human Resources and Occupational Health.
- Complete management referrals where required and/or request Occupational Health testing where alcohol or substance influence is suspected and follow telephone requests with written referral information for the confidential Occupational Health record.
- Where necessary, send the employee home or suspend from duty pending investigation, with reference to the NHS Scotland Conduct Policy suspension checklist and safe transport arrangements.
- Where testing is not available out of hours, assess the situation, seek advice from the Service On-call Manager and address immediate safety concerns. Discuss with Human Resources at the earliest opportunity.
- Complete the Supportive Plan with the employee and supply it to Occupational Health where random testing or ongoing support arrangements are agreed.
- Where results are non-negative or pending confirmation, remove the employee from safety-critical activity immediately and agree interim action with Human Resources.
- Where a member of staff is suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or another substance and is required to attend Occupational Health at another site for testing, they must not drive. The manager must ensure that appropriate alternative transport arrangements are made to safeguard the employee and others. Considerations should include the use of an authorised taxi service or staff escort, taking account of the NHS Scotland's Work-related Driving Policy and it's requirements.

5.1.3 Human Resources Staff must

- Provide expert advice and support on the application of the policy.
- Support managers to agree interim management action and next steps where concerns arise, including where laboratory confirmation is pending.
- Advise managers on the relevant NHS Scotland Workforce Policy where conduct, performance, attendance, refusal to attend Occupational Health or refusal to provide consent may require management action.
- Support managers to make follow-up arrangements as appropriate following concerns, test outcomes or refusal to test.

5.1.4 Occupational Health

- Signpost staff to appropriate support services
- Receive and manage management referrals made under this policy.
- Provide fitness-for-work advice and, where appropriate, advice on alternative duties.
- Undertake alcohol and/or substance testing where appropriate and where informed consent has been obtained.
- Explain the testing procedure to the employee and obtain written consent at each testing episode.
- Coordinate random testing arrangements where this has been agreed within a Supportive Plan.
- Maintain appropriate confidential Occupational Health records in relation to referrals, consent and testing activity.
- Provide test outcomes to management as negative or non-negative, subject to the employee's consent.
- Provide a report to the referring manager at the conclusion of a Supportive Plan, with the employee's consent.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There is a cost associated with testing for alcohol/substances. The cost for the initial test, within normal testing hours, will be met by the Occupational Health Department. However, should there be a requirement for ongoing testing, which may involve external laboratories incurring additional costs then these should be met by the appropriate directorate.

All testing outwith normal testing hours should be met by the appropriate directorate.

7. COMMUNICATION PLAN

7.1 This policy will be launched using the weekly staff briefing and it will be available on NHS Lanarkshires website.

7.2 This policy will also be discussed at the appropriate management team meetings and local partnership forams

8. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT – Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years via the Joint Policy Forum

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9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This policy meets NHS Lanarkshire's EQIA ☒ (tick box)

10. SUMMARY

This policy outlines how NHS Lanarkshire will manage concerns relating to alcohol and substance use in the workplace, ensuring a safe environment for patients, staff and the public while providing support to employees who may be experiencing alcohol or substance misuse problems. It applies to all employees, including bank, agency and sessional workers, and supports the implementation of the NHS Scotland Alcohol and Other Substances Policy.

Where concerns arise, managers may refer employees to Occupational Health for assessment and, where appropriate, alcohol or substance testing. Testing can only take place with the employee's informed consent and may be undertaken either as for-cause testing when there are concerns about fitness for work, or as part of an agreed Supportive Plan that may include random testing. Occupational Health provides fitness-for-work advice, coordinates testing, and communicates outcomes to management with the employee's consent.

The policy clearly defines the responsibilities of employees, managers, Human Resources and Occupational Health. Employees are expected to comply with the policy and engage with support where needed; managers are responsible for assessing risk and taking appropriate action; Human Resources provides advice on policy application and workforce procedures; and Occupational Health undertakes testing and provides fitness-for-work advice. Decisions regarding conduct, performance or disciplinary matters remain the responsibility of management in consultation with Human Resources and the relevant NHS Scotland Workforce Policies

11. REFERENCES

NHS Scotland Alcohol and Other Substances policy: Alcohol and Other Substances Policy Overview | NHS Scotland
NHS Scotland Attendance Policy Attendance Policy Overview | NHS Scotland
NHS Scotland Conduct Policy Conduct Policy Overview | NHS Scotland
NHS Scotland Capability Policy Capability Policy Overview | NHS Scotland
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