Workers' Comp

What You Should Know About Commonly Abused Drugs

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2 MIN READ

Substance misuse can derail recovery, extend return-to-work timelines, and complicate claims. For adjusters managing complex cases, knowing how commonly abused drugs affect the body, how long they stay detectable, and their associated risks is essential. Here's a practical guide to help you spot red flags and understand the implications.

ALCOHOL

Examples: Beer, wine, liquor

Detection Window:

- 12–80 hours

Health Risks:

- Liver disease
- Cardiovascular disease
- Dependence and withdrawal syndrome

CANNABIS

Examples: THC, Edibles, Delta-8

Detection Window:

- 3–90 Days

Health Risks:

- Respiratory issues

- Cognitive impairment
- Psychological dependence

OPIOIDS

Examples: Heroin, Oxycodone, Fentanyl

Detection Window:

- 1–14+ days

Health Risks:

- Severe dependence
- Overdose
- Death

STIMULANTS

Examples: Cocaine, MDMA, Adderall

Detection Window:

- 2–7 days

Health Risks:

- Psychosis
- Seizures
- Death

DEPRESSANTS

Examples: Benzodiazepines, Barbiturates, GHB

Detection Window:

- 1–30 days

Health Risks:

- Coma
- Respiratory depression
- Death

SLEEP MEDICATIONS

Examples: Ambien, Lunesta

Detection Window:

- 1–3 days

Health Risks:

- Dependence and withdrawal

HALLUCINOGENS

Examples: LSD, Ketamine, Mushrooms

Detection Window:

- 1–14 days

Health Risks:

- Bladder damage
- Respiratory depression
- Psychosis

GABAPENTINOIDS

Examples: Gabapentin, Pregabalin

Detection Window:

- 1–2 days

Health Risks:

- Respiratory depression
- Dependence and withdrawal

SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Examples: K2, Spice, Bath salts

Detection Window:

- 2–7 days (varies)

Health Risks:

- Severe psychosis
- Cardiovascular problems
- Death

OTC/Other

Examples: DXM, Kratom, Inhalants, Caffeine

Detection Window:

- Hours to 9 days

Health Risks:

- Seizures
- Cardiac effects
- Liver problems

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Additional Notes

1. **Detection windows** vary based on factors including:

- Frequency and amount of use
- Individual metabolism
- Body mass and hydration
- Kidney and liver function
- Drug potency and purity

2. **Standard urine drug screens** typically test for:

- Cannabinoids (THC)
- Opioids (limited panel)
- Cocaine
- Amphetamines/methamphetamines
- Benzodiazepines
- PCP
- Sometimes barbiturates and methadone

3. **Extended panels** may be required for:

   - Synthetic drugs
   - Newer opioids (fentanyl analogs)
   - Prescription medications
   - Hallucinogens

4. **False positives** can occur with certain medications and foods

5. **Drug scheduling** continues to evolve with new legislation and research

   - **Schedule I:** Highest abuse potential, no accepted medical use
   - **Schedule II:** High abuse potential, has medical uses with severe restrictions
   - **Schedule III:** Moderate abuse potential, accepted medical uses
   - **Schedule IV:** Lower abuse potential than Schedule III, accepted medical uses
   - **Schedule V:** Lowest abuse potential among scheduled drugs, accepted medical uses

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Information compiled from authoritative sources, including the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and other clinical and scientific resources current as of 2023.



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