

New Zealand School Nurses position statement on drug testing in schools

School-based approaches that prevent students using drugs and alcohol and provide help for students experiencing drug and alcohol related harm are important.

Drug Testing as a medical intervention comes under The Guardianship Act, The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (HPCAA) and The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumer Rights.

As such, School Nurses and other health professionals conducting drug testing need to follow best practice guidelines and ethical frameworks appropriate to their regulatory authority.

This position statement is intended to guide School Nurses in supporting students experiencing drug or alcohol related harm and the role of drug testing in schools.

Key Points

1.

Interventions to support behaviour change of students should be multi-faceted, because many factors contribute to behavioural choices.

These factors include a person's values, prior life experiences, and perceptions of social norms. Individual, environmental, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual factors all influence how a person acts. ¹

2.

A whole-school approach to improve student wellbeing and reduce drug harm is needed.

Whole-school approaches shape the values, attitudes and behaviours of students. "This approach enhances student achievement, engagement and retention and helps students feel they belong and are valued." ² (An example of a Whole-school approach can be found via www.tuturu.org.nz).

3.

We support the following actions to help students improve their wellbeing and avoid harm from drugs:

1. Develop a positive school culture, where wellbeing, student connectedness, and seeking help is promoted.
 2. Provide several opportunities for students to engage in activities outside of the classroom regardless of their ability level. ^{3, 4}
 3. Identify students with slipping attendance or achievement and provide support through pastoral care and student services as early as possible.
 4. Develop strong partnerships with professional alcohol and drug services, so students can be supported by a skilled team to remain at school.
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4.

If drug testing is to be used...

1. It is important to recognise its limitations, as it is not effective as an intervention on its own. ⁵ Urine drug testing results can paint an inaccurate picture because the active ingredient in cannabis remains in the body fat cells for a long time, and there are spikes in the daily levels of the metabolites as it is removed, which have no correlation with impairment.
 2. Informed consent, that is free from coercion, must be obtained from the student and their caregiver/s. This must include how the results will be used, how these results will be stored, and who will have access to these results.
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5.

School nurses should be involved in the development and review of policies and procedures involving student wellbeing, including whether drug testing is used or not.

Nurses are required in their Code of Conduct to use their expertise and influence to promote the health and well-being of vulnerable health consumers, communities and population groups ⁶ (Standard 3.8).

If drug testing in schools does occur, the following points must be considered, at a minimum, to ensure that it is safe, appropriate and upholds student rights

For all to consider

- Does the process ensure the student is treated at all times with respect? ⁷ (HDC Right 1)
- Does the process ensure that the student is free from discrimination, coercion, harassment, and exploitation? (HDC Right 2)
- Does the physical environment where testing might occur allow students to maintain their privacy and dignity? (HDC Right 1)
- Does testing support a reduction in Maori health inequalities and reflect the health needs of the community the school is in? (HDC Right 1)
- Does the process involve students knowing they have the right to complain? (HDC Right 10)
- Does the process protect the privacy of students personal information?
- Does the process ensure the student will be fully informed? (HDC Right 6)
- Does the process ensure the student has the right to receive (on request) a written summary of all information provided prior to participation in drug testing? (HDC Right 7)

Further points for health professionals to consider

- Does the process allow nurses/doctors to listen to students, ask for and respect their views about their health, and respond to their concerns and preferences? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, standard 1.3)
- Does testing respect the students rights to participate in decisions about their care, and involve them and their whanau where appropriate in care planning? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, standard 3.2)
- Does the process ensure the student has informed consent? If they are not competent to make an informed choice and give informed consent, nurses must ensure care given is in the best interests of the student and that they have taken reasonable steps to ascertain their views (HDC Right 7, NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, standard 3.5)
- Does the process allow nurses to use appropriate care and skill to assess the health needs of students, plan, implement, and evaluate their care? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, Standard 4.1).
- Enable the nurse/doctor to deliver care based on best available evidence and best practice? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, Standard 4.7).
- Does the process treat information gained in the course of the nurse-student relationship as confidential and use it for professional purposes only? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, Standard 5.2)
- Ensure students give consent to health professionals disclosing information? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, Standard 5.5)
- Ensure that health records, including the results of drug tests, are stored securely and only accessed or removed for the purpose of providing care? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, Standard 5.6)
- Ensure that students personal or health information is accessed and disclosed only as necessary for providing care? (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, Standard 5.7)

Further points for school nurses to consider

- Consider how a direct observation of urine collection (considered to be best practice) would be possible in a school, from a student, in light of their right to dignity, respect, privacy, and developmental heightened self-consciousness associated with puberty (NZ Nurses Code of Conduct, standard 1.2)
- Consider how and who would be an appropriate chaperone of the direct observation of urine collection
- Consider when student records are transferred that full permissions and consent of the student is received
- Does the process respect student possessions and property? (Standard 7.12)

References:

1. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 55(1), 68
2. Ministry of Education. (2014). Alcohol and other drug education programmes: Guide for schools. Wellington: Ministry of Education
3. Gilligan, R (2000). Adversity, Resilience and Young people: The protective value of positive school and spare time experiences. *Children and Society*, 37-47.
4. Eccles, J. S., Barber, B. L., Stone, M., & Hunt, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of social issues*, 59(4), 865-889.
5. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (Drug testing in schools). 2017. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
6. NZ Nurses Code of Conduct (2012).
7. Health and Disability Consumer Rights (1996).