



# NEWSLETTER

## ARTICLES INSIDE:

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Employers Should Know About

The Pros and Cons of Dropping Marijuana Testing

State Law Updates 2025



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# Medetomidine in the Fentanyl Supply: A New and Alarming Drug Trend Employers Should Know About

*Note: This article is provided for educational purposes only and should not be relied upon as legal advice. The reader retains full responsibility to ensure compliance with all applicable laws relative to drug testing.*

A dangerous new substance is rapidly reshaping the opioid crisis in the United States, and employers should be aware of its emergence. Medetomidine, a powerful veterinary sedative, is increasingly being found mixed into fentanyl.

Although medetomidine is not currently included in standard workplace drug testing panels, its spread reflects a broader and troubling reality. The illicit drug landscape continues to evolve quickly, and new drug combinations like this one can carry serious implications for workplace safety, employee health, and community impact.

## What Is Medetomidine?

Medetomidine is a sedative and anesthetic primarily used in veterinary medicine.

It is closely related to dexmedetomidine, a medication used in human clinical settings, but medetomidine itself is not intended for human consumption.

Public health officials have reported that medetomidine is now appearing as an adulterant in fentanyl supplies, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. According to [The New York Times](#), the drug has contributed to a growing wave of overdose cases and, notably, a new crisis of severe withdrawal symptoms unlike those typically seen with opioids alone.

## A “Withdrawal Crisis” Emerging in Philadelphia

Philadelphia has become an early epicenter of this trend. Hospitals there have seen thousands of emergency department visits related not only to overdose, but to extreme withdrawal episodes linked to medetomidine exposure.

Unlike opioid withdrawal, which is painful but rarely life-threatening, medetomidine withdrawal

has been associated with catastrophically high blood pressure, tremors, hallucinations, relentless vomiting, and ICU-level complications, according to clinicians at Temple Health.

Philadelphia health data showed more than 7,000 withdrawal-related emergency admissions in the first nine months of 2025, compared with fewer than 3,000 in all of 2023.

### Medetomidine Is Spreading Beyond One City

Medetomidine is not confined to Philadelphia. Reports indicate it has been detected in multiple states, including Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, Florida, Ohio, Colorado, and increasingly in New Jersey and Delaware.

The Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE), a national drug-checking laboratory, has documented medetomidine in a significant percentage of fentanyl samples tested in affected regions.

This pattern mirrors what occurred previously with xylozine, another veterinary sedative that spread through the illicit opioid supply before becoming a nationwide concern.

### Why Employers Should Pay Attention

Although medetomidine is not something employers are testing for directly, its rise matters for several reasons:

1. **The opioid supply is becoming more unpredictable.** Employees struggling with substance use may be exposed to drugs they never intended to take, increasing impairment and medical risk.
2. **Sedation and impairment risks are increasing.** Medetomidine has been described as causing near-instantaneous blackouts. That level of impairment poses serious safety concerns, especially in safety-sensitive industries.
3. **Withdrawal emergencies can disrupt workplaces and communities.** Severe withdrawal episodes may lead to medical crises, absenteeism, and increased strain on healthcare systems.
4. **It reflects the broader acceleration of emerging drug threats.** New substances appear faster than testing technology and regulation can keep pace.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) continues to emphasize that fentanyl remains the dominant driver of overdose deaths, and new adulterants only increase unpredictability.

## What This Means Going Forward

At this stage, medetomidine is primarily a public health surveillance issue rather than a workplace testing issue. However, employers should view this trend as another reminder that drug threats are constantly evolving.

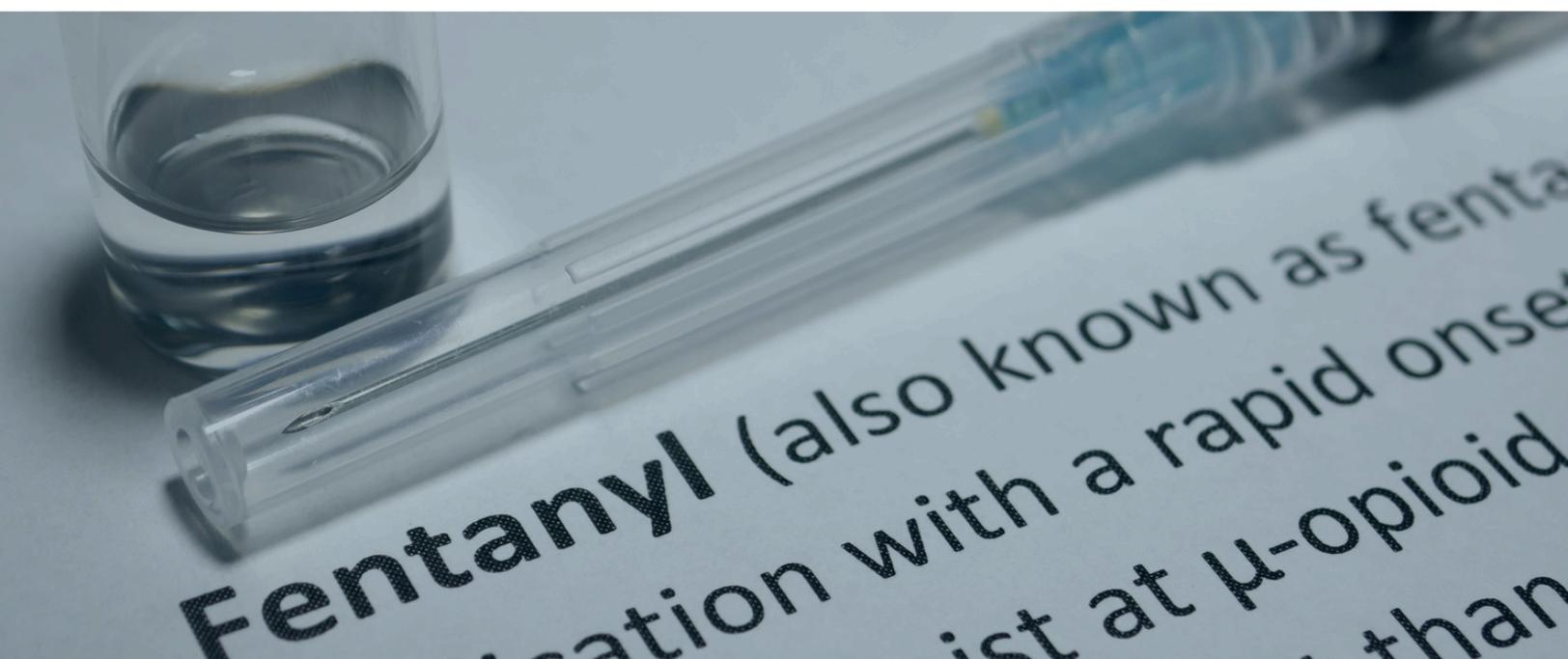
Staying informed helps organizations maintain effective drug-free workplace programs, support employee well-being, and recognize that impairment risks may come from substances beyond traditional panels.

As researchers and health agencies continue monitoring medetomidine's spread, further guidance may emerge in the coming year.

## Conclusion

Medetomidine's appearance in fentanyl represents a disturbing new phase of the opioid epidemic—one defined not only by overdose risk, but by severe and life-threatening withdrawal. Employers do not need to panic, but they should remain aware: today's drug trends are changing rapidly, and vigilance remains essential.

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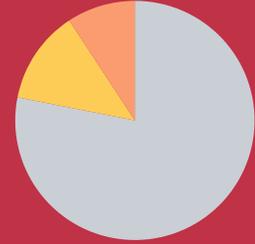


# MARIJUANA USE AT WORK

## Marijuana is Most Used Illicit Drug

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported past year drug use in the USA among 12+.

<span style="color: #808080;">■</span> Marijuana	64.2 M	M-Millions
<span style="color: #FFD700;">■</span> Hallucinogens	10.4 M	
<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> Rx Opioids Misuse	7.6 M	



## 2023 Marijuana Use (12+)



## 2024 Marijuana Use (12+)



## Marijuana Use by Employed

# 27,310

Employed adults, 18+ used marijuana in the past month.



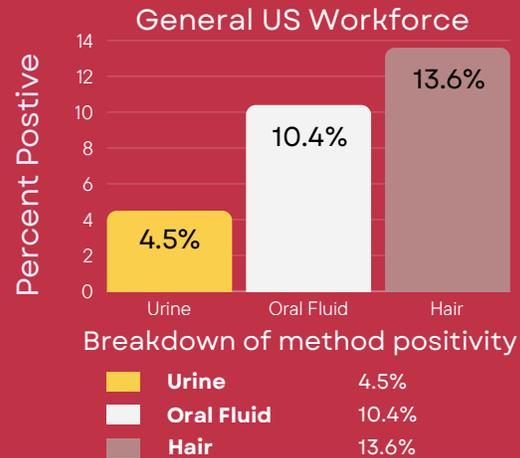
## When Employees Use Marijuana



## Post-Accidents for Marijuana



## Marijuana Testing Positivity



# The Pros and Cons of Dropping Marijuana Testing

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When it comes to marijuana, there's no doubt that attitudes are rapidly shifting in the United States from "just say no" to "live and let live."

A 2024 Pew Research Center poll revealed that 88 percent of Americans now support legalizing marijuana.<sup>1</sup> That isn't just support for medical marijuana, but legalization of marijuana for recreational use also. This maintains a record-high level reached in previous years in support of marijuana legalization.

No one wants to be the next viral story under the civil liberties spotlight, so some employers are choosing to drop marijuana from their drug-free workplace policies. With increased support nationally, some employers still question if testing for marijuana is a good idea. There are pros to dropping marijuana. But do the pros outweigh the cons?

## The Pros of Dropping Marijuana Testing

The **first** and foremost advantage to dropping marijuana testing is money. Fewer tests mean fewer costs, right? From the outside, this may seem like a logical assumption. In reality, it just isn't true. Dropping marijuana from a drug testing panel means employers have to make special requests of laboratories and medical review officers to conduct testing but ignore marijuana results OR change to a modified panel that on average costs the same or more as a standard panel including marijuana. Either way, an employer is paying the same cost as before or maybe even more.

The **second** pro to dropping marijuana testing is privacy. If marijuana is "legal" in more states than ever, then an employer shouldn't really care if his or her employees are using it outside of work. To inquire into a legal activity is an invasion of privacy, right? To assume that employers have no business inquiring into employees' marijuana use because it's "legal" is like saying that employers shouldn't care about excessive and abusive alcohol consumption.

Just because an activity or substance is considered "legal" doesn't mean that it's safe or that an employer should turn a blind eye. And as a side note, marijuana is still illegal at the federal level, and most states with legalized marijuana still allow and encourage workplace drug testing!

**Finally**, a pro towards dropping marijuana could be that as laws rapidly change, an employer does not have to keep up with the constant changes and corresponding policy updates. Although true to some extent, the cost of policy reviews and updates is generally nominal, while the cost of increased workers' compensation claims could be 10 times the cost to an employer for a single claim. And, as far as exposure to legal liability goes, a strong and properly worded policy does not necessarily prevent employees from bringing frivolous cases against you, but it could protect you from the cost of litigation and prevent the risk of negligent hiring claims and respondeat superior cases that can be significantly more expensive for employers.

### **The Cons of Dropping Marijuana Testing**

The first con from dropping marijuana testing is that more drug abusing individuals will apply to work for your company. This isn't an assumption; it is a documented fact. A few years ago, JCB, a heavy-equipment manufacturer, held a job fair near Savannah, Georgia. When the throng of potential employees learned that the next step of the application process would be a drug test, about half of them left.<sup>2</sup> Had that group of potential employees initially numbered 30, then that would mean about 15 of them refused to continue because of drug testing. We cannot assume that all of them were drug users. Some people may object on the grounds that a drug test is an invasion of their privacy. However, we can safely assume that at least some of them, if not most, were current drug users. So, when you drop marijuana testing, you can be certain that more marijuana abusing individuals will apply to work for you. Since you are no longer testing, some will inevitably get hired, bringing all the problems associated with marijuana to your workplace.

Additionally, when an employer discontinues testing for marijuana, he or she will assume more costs, both hard and soft dollar costs. The federal government estimates the overall cost of addressing substance abuse in America is \$600 billion annually.<sup>3</sup> The annual estimated cost of drug abuse on businesses alone is \$193 billion. That breaks down to \$120 billion in lost productivity, \$11 billion in healthcare costs, and \$61 billion in criminal justice costs.<sup>4</sup>

This estimate comes from 2007, the latest available estimate used by the federal government. Since then, public opinion has shifted more in favor of legalizing marijuana, and teen and adult marijuana use has risen, especially in those states that have made it fully legal. It is safe to say that this is a conservative estimate if applied to the economy of 2025.

Additionally, the White House has published statistics online that show that current drug users:

- Are twice as likely as non-drug users to report working for three or more different employers in a one-year period (increased turnover).
- Current drug users are more likely to miss two or more workdays due to illness or injury (lost productivity).
- Full-time workers who are current drug users are twice as likely as non-drug users to skip one or more days of work in a month (lost productivity).

That level of turnover, sick leave, and absenteeism can cause a logistical nightmare for any size company and make revenue and profits that much harder to guarantee. When an employer stops testing for marijuana, more marijuana users will join the company. As this happens, that company's share of the nation's lost productivity, healthcare costs, and criminal justice costs will increase.

## Conclusion

Legalized marijuana is not going away, in fact, it is fair to assume it is going to continue to spread in the United States and globally. The full cost of legalization is yet to be discovered, but based on what we know now, the cost to employers will be significant. More people are using drugs than in the past 15 years and marijuana is fueling that increase. Employers have the right to test for all drugs, including marijuana. Drug testing is not only smart for public safety and workplace safety, but also fiscally responsible for employers. An up-to-date drug testing policy, ongoing drug education based on facts, and continued pre- and post-employment drug testing programs help make workplaces safer and companies more profitable!

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[1] Most Americans Favor Legalizing Marijuana for Medical, Recreational Use. Pew Research Center. March 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/03/26/most-americans-favor-legalizing-marijuana-for-medical-recreational-use/>

[2] Calmes, J. (May 17, 2016). The New York Times. Hiring Hurdle: Finding Workers Who Can Pass a Drug Test. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/business/hiring-hurdle-finding-workers-who-can-pass-a-drug-test.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/business/hiring-hurdle-finding-workers-who-can-pass-a-drug-test.html?_r=0)

[3] SAMHSA (July 26, 2016). Prevention of substance abuse and mental disorders. Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention>

[4] The White House (2016). How Illicit Drug Use Affects Business and the Economy. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/ondcp-fact-sheets/how-illicit-drug-use-affects-business-and-the-economy>





# State Law Updates 2025

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In 2025 several states passed new legislation that impacts drug testing. While the state law changes have been relatively quiet compared to some past years, many of the moves in 2025 signal a shift to modernize drug law and testing. These trends will continue to be relevant in coming years.

## **Advance Notice of Employment Action Against Medical Marijuana Users**

Minnesota, known for its strict approach to drug testing, introduced new changes to its marijuana laws that add further regulations for employers. Under the newest requirements passed in 2025 (SF 2370), employers must provide advance notice in certain situations before taking adverse action against a medical marijuana patient.

Specifically, if an employer believes that accepting a positive marijuana test from an employee or applicant would violate federal law, state law, or result in the loss of a monetary or licensing-related benefit, they are required to give the employee or applicant at least 14 days' notice before proceeding with any adverse employment action. The notice must include citation to the specific federal law or regulation that the employer believes will be violated if they fail to act, or the monetary or licensing-related benefit under federal law or regulations that the employer will lose if they fail to act.

This requirement applies exclusively to medical cannabis patients and does not extend to recreational marijuana users.

Additionally, the Minnesota law explicitly prohibits employers from retaliating against medical cannabis patients for asserting their rights or seeking remedies under Minnesota's medical cannabis laws.

## Mandatory Notifications Go Electronic

In 2025, Iowa enacted changes to its mandatory workplace drug testing law ([HF 767](#)) that offer some notable advantages to employers. The updated law permits employers to deliver notifications and make requests to employees either electronically or through in-person exchanges, eliminating the previous requirement to use certified mail. Additionally, the law now places the burden of proof on aggrieved employees or applicants to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that a violation of the drug testing statute caused them damages. The amended law also introduces a new requirement for employers to formally designate safety-sensitive positions. These updates, for the most part, simplify compliance and provide some legal protection for employers.

## Regulating Kratom and Synthetic Cannabinoids

States in 2025 are taking greater action on emerging intoxicants like kratom and synthetic cannabis, expanding their focus beyond traditional drugs to address a broader range of public health and safety concerns.

States are taking the psychoactive substance kratom more seriously, with legislatures moving to regulate the drug. Kratom is a plant-based substance containing compounds that act on the opioid receptors in the brain, which can cause both stimulant-like and opioid-like effects depending on the dose. Colorado ([SB 072](#)), Rhode Island ([H 5565](#)), and South Dakota ([HB 1056](#)) all passed bills in 2025 that regulate kratom.

Additionally, Montana ([HB 49](#)) implemented a ban on synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cannabinoid products.

In a move that also reflects increased attention to emerging intoxicating substances, Florida amended its DUI law in 2025 ([H 0687](#)) to prohibit driving under the influence of any "impairing substance." Previously, the DUI law applied only to a more limited list of specific substances like alcohol and controlled substances.

## Legalizing Psychedelics

On the flip side, a small number of states were working in 2025 to open access to psychedelics. New Mexico legalized medical psilocybin in 2025 ([SB 219](#)), removing psilocybin and psilocin from New Mexico's Controlled Substances Act Schedule I substances. Oregon, which legalized psilocybin in 2020, also passed a 2025 bill which allowed health care providers to offer psilocybin services ([HB 2387](#)).

Lastly, California now permits the Veteran's Affairs Administration to conduct studies on the use of psilocybin to treat veterans, provided the studies are registered with the proper authorities ([AB 1103](#)).

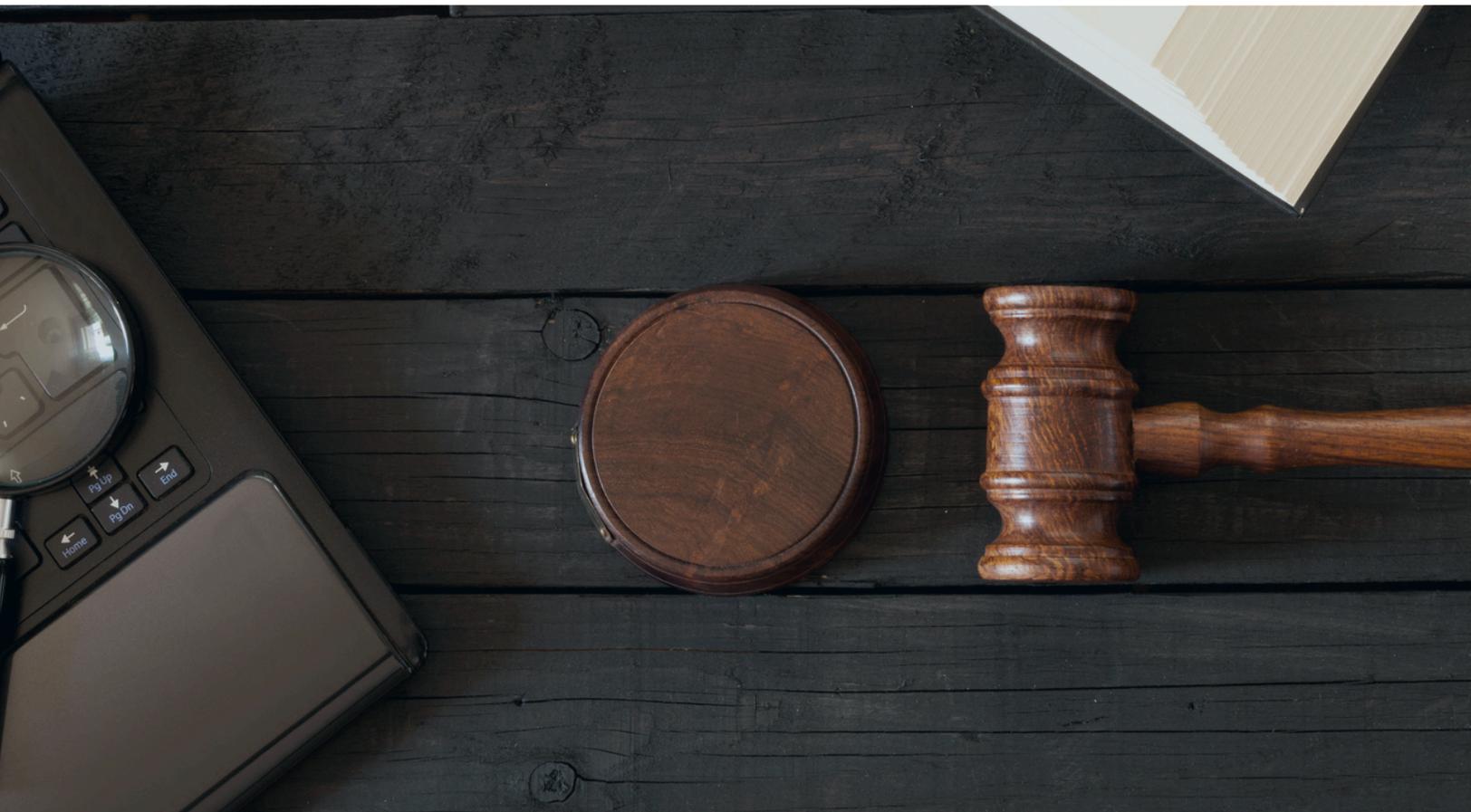
### Rise in Oral Fluid Testing

Continuing a trend the industry has witnessed for several years now, oral fluid testing continues to gain more regulatory favor. Both Maine ([LD 1135](#)) and Montana ([HB 467](#)) revised their DUI laws in 2025 to permit the use of oral fluid testing. This highlights the growing prominence of oral fluid testing in almost all sectors of drug testing.

### Conclusion

The drug testing legislation of 2025 highlights a growing recognition of new public health and safety challenges. As more states adapt their laws, employers and policymakers alike will need to stay informed and responsive to an increasingly complex landscape.

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