

Testing Positive

# Drug Use Skyrockets among American Workers

**D**RUG USE is rapidly increasing among American workers, as more states liberalize marijuana laws, cocaine makes a resurgence and more people abuse amphetamines and heroin.

A new study by Quest Diagnostics Inc., a workplace drug-testing lab, found that the number of workers testing positive for illicit drugs is higher than at any time in the past two decades.

That puts employers in a tricky predicament, particularly if employees are using at work, which could reduce productivity and also make them more susceptible to workplace injuries since they may not be as focused as they should be on their work.

While there were marked increases in positive tests for most illicit drugs, the surprising exception was prescription opioids like hydrocodone and oxycodone, thanks to stricter enforcement in many jurisdictions around the country.

Marijuana is the most commonly used drug among U.S. workers and was identified in 2.5% of all urine tests for the general workforce in 2021, up from 2.4% a year earlier.

The highest increases for marijuana usage among workers seemed to be in states that have legalized the recreational use of cannabis.

The number of workers testing positive in Colorado rose 11%, while in Washington there was a 9% increase. The rates of increase were more than double the increase nationwide in 2016.

### Implications for businesses

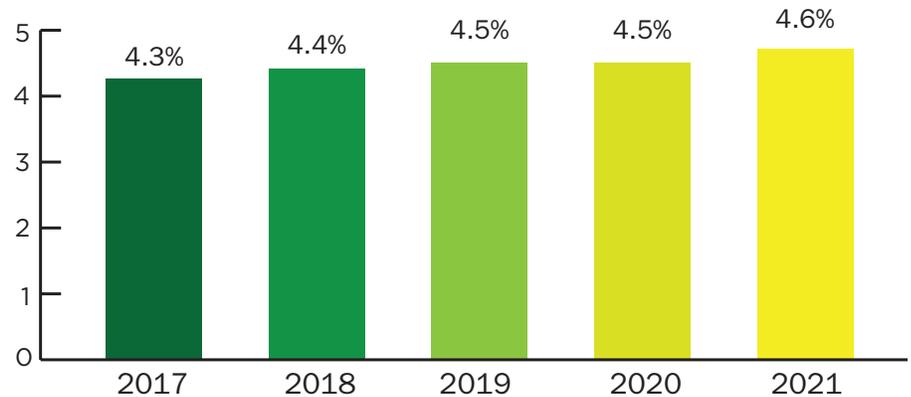
About 12% of workers who die on the job test positive for drugs or alcohol in their system at the time of the incident. And incidentally, one OSHA study found that the most dangerous occupations, like construction and mining, also have the highest drug use rates among workers.

### Substance Abuse Fallout

- Poor work performance.
- Often call in sick or arrive late.
- Frequently change workplaces.
- Struggle with productivity.
- Injure themselves or others.

## TRENDING HIGHER

Percent of employee urine tests coming up positive.



### POSITIVE TESTS PER DRUG

Amphetamine: Up 8%  
 Marijuana: Up 4.6%  
 Heroin: 0% (after 146% increase in four years prior)

Oxycodone: Down 4%  
 Cocaine: Up 12%

### The takeaway

If you're concerned, you can initiate an effective workplace drug program that includes drug testing before hiring and during employment — and the consequences for violating the rules.

You may also want to consider an employee assistance program for workers who feel they may have a problem, as well as for those who feel they're developing a problem. And you may also want to consider holding meetings about health and safety and drug use.

Provide education about what addiction looks like and why people begin to abuse drugs and/or alcohol. ❖

