

Clarity through continuity: repeat testing in Family Court



Marie Law, Director of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs, discusses the application and benefits of repeat drug and alcohol testing in the Family Court

Drug and alcohol testing are critical tools in Family Court, particularly where concerns exist around parental substance misuse.

While a single test may confirm either historical or recent use, depending on the type of test taken, it offers only a limited view of behaviour. By contrast, repeat testing enables the court to monitor patterns over time, assess compliance with court orders, and identify relapse or recovery.

Repeat testing is especially valuable when contact or custody arrangements are under review, as it offers a clearer, more consistent evidential picture to support decisions that prioritise child welfare.

Repeat testing in practice

Repeat drug and alcohol testing is increasingly used to identify patterns of behaviour and support safeguarding assessments, and is typically requested where:

- ▶ There is a known or suspected history of dependency
- ▶ Concerns have been raised by the other parent, social services or healthcare professionals
- ▶ A parent must demonstrate abstinence to regain contact or custody
- ▶ Ongoing monitoring is needed to assess compliance

Crucially, repeat testing can also support rehabilitation, allowing parents in recovery to demonstrate sustained change and rebuild trust with professionals and family members.

Testing methods

The choice of testing method depends on the required timeframe, the substances being tested for, and practical considerations. However, a combination of both wide-window and narrow-window tests often provides the most comprehensive insight.

- ▶ **Hair drug/alcohol testing**
Detects drug and/or alcohol use up to 12 months. Segmenting head hair into 1cm sections also allows for month-by-month analysis.
- ▶ **Nail drug/alcohol testing**
Provides a similar window of detection as hair (up to 6 months for fingernails, and up to 12 months for toenails) and is ideal where hair is unavailable.
- ▶ **Urine drug testing**
Detects drug use up to four days and is suited to frequent monitoring or abstinence verification.
- ▶ **Oral fluid drug testing**
Detects very recent use (up to 48 hours) and is useful for real-time testing during supervised contact or pre-proceedings.
- ▶ **PEth blood alcohol testing**
The gold standard for alcohol monitoring. As a direct biomarker of consumption, it can detect even moderate drinking. With a detection window of up to 4 weeks, PEth testing (including finger prick PEth testing) is ideal for ongoing monitoring.
- ▶ **Breath alcohol testing**
Provides immediate results and is often used to confirm sobriety before contact sessions.

Benefits for legal professionals and the court

Repeat testing offers several key benefits for professionals tasked with making safeguarding decisions:

- ▶ **Clarity over time** – Patterns of use, relapse, or abstinence become more evident when assessed across multiple tests/time periods
- ▶ **Evidence of compliance** – Courts can verify adherence to contact or rehabilitation conditions with confidence
- ▶ **Support for rehabilitation** – Parents engaging with recovery services can demonstrate progress
- ▶ **Improved safeguarding** – Timely data allows professionals to act quickly when risk increases

When used effectively, repeat testing is more than a monitoring tool; it supports robust, evidence-led decision-making in the best interests of the child.

Building the full picture

AlphaBiolabs is a UKAS 17025 and Lab 51-accredited laboratory with over 20 years' experience supporting family law professionals, social workers and local authorities.

We provide legally-admissible drug and alcohol testing using a range of sample types, including hair, nails, blood, oral fluid, urine, and breath, with bespoke repeat testing schedules available.

To request a quote, contact our New Enquiry team on 0333 600 1300 / testing@alphabiolabs.com or complete our online quote form www.alphabiolabs.co.uk/legal-test-forms/.

*To learn more about the benefits of repeat drug and alcohol testing, register for one of our FREE webinars on **Tuesday 4 November at 12pm** or **Thursday 6 November at 9am**, where our experts will explore drug and alcohol testing in practice and answer your questions live.*

Marie Law, Director of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs

A highly-skilled and respected scientist with over 15 years' experience in the field of forensics, Marie joined AlphaBiolabs in 2022 and oversees the company's growing toxicology team.

As Director of Toxicology, Marie's day-to-day responsibilities include maintaining the highest quality testing standards for toxicology and further enhancing AlphaBiolabs' drug and alcohol testing services for the legal sector, members of the public, and the workplace sector.



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