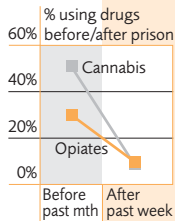


The Scottish Prison Service is reconsidering random **drug testing** with a view to refocusing on treatment rather than punishing inmates who test positive. Officials are concerned that testing has failed to curb drug use and led **prisoners** to replace cannabis with heroin, detectable in urine for only a fraction of the time. New research in England and Wales partially substantiates these concerns.

The researchers marshalled existing data and new data from interviews in 2001 and 2002 with over 2200 prisoners which clearly demonstrated that whilst testing may deter opiate use to some extent, its major impact is to deter cannabis use. In their current prison about 4 in 10 prisoners had used an illegal drug. More had used cannabis than opiates (32% v. 21%) but for each about 1 in 10 had used in the past week and opiates were used slightly more often than cannabis. Since more prisoners were using cannabis than opiates before prison (51% v. 30% in the month before), this represents a greater reduction in cannabis than opiate use **chart**. There was a strong tendency for dependent opiate users to continue to use regularly in prison but also a few started or renewed their opiate use, particularly if prison had interrupted methadone treatment, yet at the time of the study test results were rarely used to direct prisoners into treatment. Since random drug testing started, cannabis positives have steadily declined while opiate positives have remained stable.



① Singleton N. *et al.* [The impact of mandatory drug testing in prisons](#). Home Office online report 03/05, 2005. Copies: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds.