

from good to bad homes and they try drugs for a number of complex reasons.

As a parent, the best thing you can do is to be aware of the problem before it gets out of control. Getting to the point of policing your child's bodily fluids indicates things have gotten out of control.

But in reality it is one way of addressing the problem.

Pathologist Dr Melissa Yssel speaks to many concerned parents about their kids. They're concerned that their child is showing strange behaviour.

"All parents know is that there are drugs at school but they don't know what to do" said Dr Yssel, a member of the National Pathology Group (NPG).

She advises parents who are deeply suspicious to arrange for a full drug screen. It is a simple urine test and once the sample reaches the laboratory, results can be obtained within hours.

A full drug screen is essential. It is the slightly more expensive option, but a test for a single drug is unlikely to be accurate because of both the nature of street drugs and the habits of drug users.

Almost all drugs available on the street today are "cut" and not "pure". This means that they don't actually contain what the user thinks they contain.

The supplier has cut his costs by either mixing drugs, or mixing in other ingredients that inexperienced users won't be able to identify.

Ecstasy bought at a rave might contain no "E" at all, just a mix-

ture of the NPG, said: "The standard drugs tested for include LSD, Mandrax Ecstasy, cocaine, cannabis, opiates (e.g. heroin), amphetamines, PCP, propoxyphene, and methadone.

There are also newer drugs on the scene, which require individual tests. CAT and GBH, a date rape drug are the newest to hit the scene.

Dr Yssel's laboratory has seen a significant increase in the number of tests processed over the last few years."

Dr Yssel cautioned parents never to think their children were too young to be taking drugs. "It is quite common to see 11-year-old drug users.

"Unfortunately, children involved in the drug scene become very wise very early on about how to get around tests. If you suspect a serious problem, you will need to supervise the production of the urine sample.

"Users get clever and there are all kinds of ways they try and doctor their samples using a household, bleach and pool chemical kits."

Dr Yssel said that knowledge for parents was the key.

"Once the test results are available, the family and their GP can decide on treatment.

"A full drug screen should cost between R800 and R1 000. Unfortunately, medical aid schemes do not cover this cost, but the accurate information provided by such a test is the first step on the road to recovery."

Shamim Garda, National Executive Director of Sanca warned



DRUG pushers are finding novel ways of introducing drugs to younger schoolchildren, by making them as trendy as sweets.

parents that drug pushers were no longer targeting high schools only.

"Children as young as nine and ten have become hooked. Drugs have become cheaper and the pushers have found ways to infiltrate the market.

"Our strategies are aimed at making children and teens aware of the dangers and getting them informed. Prevention is always better than cure."

Garda said the yearly Drug Awareness Week was aimed at highlighting the dangers of drugs and this year's theme was encouraging drug users that treatment was available and that it worked.

"Too many addicts give up on themselves and they continue drugging or they commit suicide believing they're a lost cause.

"But we have many success stories."

Signs and symptoms of teen drinking and drug use:

- Wild mood changes – a bit difficult to tell, because teenagers at the best of times can be moody.

But if their sleeping patterns change, they change hobbies, seem depressed, withdraw from friends and stop caring about the way they look or dress. They act aggressively when you ask them questions.

- Negative changes in schoolwork, missing school, or declining grades.

- Increased secrecy about possessions or activities.

- Use of incense, room deodorant, or perfume to hide smoke or chemical odours.

- Subtle changes in conversations with friends, eg more secretive, using "coded" language.

- Change in clothing choices: new fascination with clothes that high-

light drug use.

- Increase in borrowing money.

- Evidence of drug paraphernalia such as pipes, rolling papers, etc.

- Evidence of use of inhalant products (such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, common household products). Rags and paper bags are sometimes used as accessories.

- Bottles of eye drops, which may be used to mask bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils.

- New use of mouthwash or breath mints to cover up the smell of alcohol.

- Missing prescription drugs – especially narcotics and mood stabilizers.

- *This week is Drug Awareness Week sponsored by Sanca. For any information on drugs and their side effects and treatment for drug and alcohol addiction, phone 011-482-1070.*