



Managing illegal drug contamination in homes

Guide for homeowners, property managers and real estate agents

This guide will help you to arrange professional testing and cleaning of a house where illegal drugs such as methamphetamine (meth) have been made, or where drugs have been smoked inside.

Types of illicit drug activity and their public health risks

Drug contamination in a home can occur when someone makes or smokes illegal drugs inside a house. Contamination from chemicals, especially meth, can create health and safety risks that remain in the house unless they are properly cleaned up. Health risks depend on what type of drug activity has occurred:

Clandestine laboratory (clan lab)

What is it?	Public health risk	Recommended testing and cleaning
A property where illegal drugs are made using dangerous chemicals and various cooking instruments	Meth, MDMA, heroin or synthetic opioids – high risk People who have been exposed to meth clan labs have shown changes in behaviour, trouble sleeping, and breathing problems. Children, pregnant women, and older adults are most at risk ¹ .	A clan lab will need strict testing and cleaning by suitably qualified testing and remediation companies. Some items (such as contaminated curtains, carpet, or sofas) may need to be thrown away.
	All other clan labs – low risk E.g. cannabis oil extraction, psilocybin mushrooms, DMT extraction. The biggest health risks are getting hurt from physical damage to the home such as broken walls or faulty electrical wiring, presence of mould or leftover chemicals like pesticides or fertilisers.	Items used to manufacture drugs should be removed and a deep clean of the property should be considered.

¹ [enHealth Clandestine drug laboratories and public health risks guidance, 2017](#)

Drug smoke house

What is it?	Public health risk	Recommended testing and cleaning
Places where drugs like meth are smoked but not made	Generally low risk². However, the health risk depends on how much and how often drugs were smoked. If the meth level is above 0.5 micrograms per 100cm ² , it may pose a risk to health and further action is required.	Recommend testing. If levels are above 0.5 micrograms per 100cm ² cleaning by a suitably qualified remediation company is recommended. Usually, only contaminated rooms will need a deep clean and most things can be cleaned and kept.

Cannabis grow house

What is it?	Public health risk	Recommended testing and cleaning
Places where illegal cannabis (marijuana) is grown	Low risk The biggest risks are getting hurt from physical changes or damage to the home (such as broken walls or faulty electrical wiring) or breathing in mould or leftover chemicals like pesticides or fertilisers.	Only contaminated rooms should be cleaned. Most things can be cleaned and kept. Any electrical and other structural issues should be repaired by a qualified professional.

Although health problems might come from other causes like poor nutrition or other medical issues, it is important to see a doctor if someone thinks they are sick because of prior drug contamination in the house.

Legal responsibilities

Landlords, property managers and real estate agents have a duty of care under the:

- *Residential Tenancy Act 1987*, to make sure that any rented or sold property is clean and complies with safety laws.
- *Public Health Act 2016*, to make sure human health is protected.

It is important to understand your legal responsibilities and take the necessary precautions to ensure a house is safe for sale or renting.

Consumer protection laws

If known serious health hazards, such as leftover chemical residues from a clan lab, are not reported and fixed, [Consumer Protection](#) considers this a breach of the [Real Estate and Business Agents and Sales Representatives Code of Conduct 2016](#) (the Code).

² Department of Health Western Australia [Public health risks of methylamphetamine \(meth\) smoke houses technical report](#), 2021

Under the Code, real estate agents and property managers must find out important facts about a property before selling or renting it. If the home was used as a clan lab or smoke house, prospective tenants or buyers must be told as this may impact their decision to buy or rent the property.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act every residential tenancy agreement states the landlord must comply with the requirements for buildings, health and safety laws (see section 42(2)(c)). If there's a chance the property is contaminated, it's a good idea to get it tested and/or cleaned. Make sure to get a report or statement from the cleaning company to prove it was cleaned, or cleaning wasn't needed. Refer to renting a home for more information.

Public health laws

General public health duty

The general public health duty of the Public Health Act requires a person to take all reasonable and practicable steps to prevent or minimise any harm to public health that might foreseeably result from anything done or omitted to be done by the person.

In principle, this means a property owner that knows their property has been used as a clan lab or for smoking high risk drugs has a duty of care to make sure the property is safe to live in for future occupants.

Improvement notices and enforcement orders

If a property owner doesn't take steps to test and clean up a property from illegal drug contamination, a local government authorised officer has the power to issue an improvement notice or enforcement order to order testing and clean up. A notice may also be issued to declare a house or part of a house unfit for habitation until clean up has been done.

Prosecution

If a property owner, manager, or real estate agent knowingly rents or sells a property that was used as a clan lab and the house hasn't been properly cleaned to best practice standard, they may be committing an offence.

Generally, activities connected to meth clan labs may pose a material or serious public health risk depending on the circumstances and status of lab operation. By contrast, drug smoke houses and cannabis grow houses are more likely to cause a material or low public health risk.

Whether someone has created a material or serious public health risk is ultimately decided by the courts. There are large penalties under the Public Health Act, ranging from \$8,000 to \$250,000, for a person or corporation who commits an offence.

Responsibility for cleaning a contaminated home

The property owner is responsible for making sure the property is clean and safe according to the [Guide for Testing and Remediation of Methamphetamine and Illicit Drug Residues in Residential Properties](#). Property owners and real estate agents should make sure the house is safe for the next occupants before selling or renting.

Responsibility if someone gets sick from a contaminated home

If a tenant or home buyer becomes unwell from meth contamination, legal action may be taken if the landlord, real estate agent or property manager knew the house was used as a meth clan lab or drug smoke house and didn't take the necessary steps to ensure it was remediated (cleaned).

Landlord responsibilities

Landlords should make sure their homes are clean and safe before renting them out. If they think the home was used as a clan lab or smoke house, it is recommended that they clean the house properly before anyone new moves in. Some landlords may choose to do a precautionary clean for every new tenant, just to be safe. Look for [warning signs](#) during routine inspections.

⚠ If a home wasn't cleaned properly before, drug residue could still be there, even if the current tenants didn't cause it.

Insurance and drug contamination

Some insurance companies don't cover the cost of testing or cleaning a home that's been contaminated by illegal drug activity. Even if they do, they might raise the excess (the amount you pay before insurance helps) or limit how much they'll pay. It's important for landlords to check their insurance policy carefully.



Warning signs of illicit drug activity

Keep an eye out for illicit drug activity at a property. Check warning signs.

General warning signs	• Lots of visitors coming and going at odd hours. • Windows always covered or blacked out. • People living there seem secretive or act strangely. • Landlord, neighbours, real estate agents or property managers are not allowed inside. • Expensive security cameras or alarms. • Rent is paid in cash.
Clan lab signs	• Strong smell of ammonia, chlorine, or solvents (especially if there's no pool). • Lots of cold and flu tablet packs, chemical containers, or fertiliser bags in rubbish. • Bottles with two layers of liquid. • Uncommon or unusual chemical containers. • Red fuel cans with hoses attached. • Lab equipment like glass tubes and beakers. • Stains on benches and surfaces. • Gas cylinders with blue-stained valves. • Large numbers of broken lithium batteries. • Dead plants or stained soil near drains or taps. • White powder on the ground outside. • Small plastic bags (matchbox sized) or digital scales.
Drug smoke house signs	• People acting drunk, confused, or aggressive. • Glass pipes found in the home. • Small plastic bags (matchbox sized) or digital scales. ⚠ Note: some of these behaviours might be from health problems, not illicit drug use.
Cannabis grow house signs	• House looks empty or people are rarely seen. • Toys outside but no kids living there. • Constant noise from fans or humming sounds, especially at night. • Roof whirlybirds spinning continually even on cold nights. • Water damage or mould near windows and walls. • Power surges or drops in nearby homes. • Strange wiring near the power meter. • Odd smells like sweet vegetation, pine, or rotten cabbage. • Mail piling up, lights always on, or radio / TV left on all the time. • Large plastic drums or chemical containers (more than usual for a home).

Reporting

⚠ If you suspect a property is being used for making, smoking, or growing illegal drugs, contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or lodge an [online report](#).

Taking precautions

Precautionary cleaning

Even if you're not sure a house is contaminated, it's still a good idea to do a deep clean between tenants or prior to selling. This can help lower any possible health risks.

Precautionary cleaning checklist	✓
Washing all floors, counters, and lower walls several times using sugar soap, bleach or an alkaline detergent	☐
Vacuuming carpets and rugs	☐
Steam cleaning (with hot water and detergent) or dry cleaning carpets, rugs, sofas or other soft furnishings	☐
Machine washing curtains	☐
Wiping down fixtures (power points, windowsills, etc.) and other surfaces using sugar soap, bleach, or an alkaline detergent	☐
Cleaning filters on air conditioners	☐
Removing waste	☐
Keeping a copy of the invoice or a clean up statement to show what was done	☐
If in doubt, throw it out	☐

Reducing risks of clan lab contamination in houses

There are three main steps to manage clan lab contamination in a property:

1. **Testing:** done by qualified testing companies and labs to find out if contamination is present.
2. **Remediation (cleaning):** completed by qualified environmental cleaning companies to remove any contamination.
3. **Validation:** properties are re-tested to make sure the house is safe after cleaning.

Note: It is recommended that you use two companies, one for testing and validation, and a second, different company to do the cleaning works. This may help you from being overcharged for unnecessary services. Aim to use a testing company where they employ someone with tertiary qualifications in the fields of occupational hygiene, forensic science, environmental engineering, environmental science or environmental health. Cleaning companies should have specialised skills and knowledge in forensic cleaning.

Key resources

The [Checklist for Hiring Companies to Test or Clean Up Drug Contamination](#) will help you to choose reliable testing and cleaning companies.

It is recommended that testing and cleaning companies follow the requirements of the [Guide for Testing and Remediation of Methamphetamine and Illicit Drug Residues in Residential](#)

[Properties](#), which outlines best practice for testing, cleaning and validation of a property following drug contamination.

Testing

You don't need to test for drug contamination between every tenant, unless you suspect or are made aware of drug contamination at the property.

Testing should be done by a suitably qualified testing company.

How testing works

- Swab samples are taken from at least five surfaces in the home.
- These samples are sent to a [NATA-accredited lab](#) to check for meth and other chemicals.
- Quick swab test kits are available, but they're not very accurate and can't be used as legal proof of contamination.

⚠ If meth levels are above 0.5 micrograms per 100 cm², more testing and cleaning are recommended. If the home was a clan lab, it is recommended you let the Environmental Health Services at your local government know.

Initial screening assessment

The testing company will take some initial samples to see if contamination is present.

Detailed assessment

If contamination is found a more detailed assessment will be undertaken to get better understanding of how far the contamination is spread.

Can people still live in the home?

1. Small area of contamination

- If only one area (like a bedroom or garage) is contaminated, people can live in unaffected parts of the house.
- No one should be inside during cleaning works.

2. Widespread contamination

- If common areas like the kitchen or living room are affected, anyone living in the house may need to move out temporarily.

3. Level of risk versus moving out

- Testing companies will review the level of health risk before advising people to move out.
- Sometimes, staying in the house might be safer than having nowhere to live – especially if the contamination has been there a while and hasn't made anyone unwell.

4. Health Investigation Levels (HILs)

- These are threshold numbers used to decide if contamination is dangerous.
- If testing shows that levels are above the recommended HILs, remediation work will likely be required.

- High HILs do not always mean people should move out of the house – it depends on how bad the contamination is and the level of exposure.

Remediation (cleaning)

Professional cleaning

If there's proof of contamination (like positive test results or a notice from the local government or police), impacted areas of the home should be cleaned properly.

Cleaning and all remediation work should be done by a suitably qualified remediation company.

The cleaning company should follow the [Guide for Testing and Remediation of Methamphetamine and Illicit Drug Residues in Residential Properties](#).

Remediation action plan

The level of cleaning will depend on how big the clan lab was and how far the contamination has been detected during testing.

A testing company should prepare a remediation action plan for the cleaning company that outlines the specific cleaning work required to safely decontaminate a property, including the areas to be treated, the methods to be used and validation steps to confirm the house is safe.

The property owner should read and agree to the remediation action plan before cleaning commences and to agree on fees.

What can you expect during cleaning?

During a clean, you could expect:

- vacuuming using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter
- disposal of items that are stained, old, low value or have porous surfaces and are more likely to be contaminated
- carpets will normally be removed and disposed of
- ceilings and fixtures may need to be cleaned
- cleaning or replacement of any impacted ventilation ducting and air-conditioner filters
- possible replacement of some damaged structures
- flushing of drains and plumbing.
- removal of any garden chemical waste, and excavation, if necessary, of associated soil.

Validation

After the property has been cleaned, it needs to be re-tested to make sure the place is safe.

If drug contamination levels are still high, another cleaning cycle of impacted rooms will be needed.

What to look for in a validation report

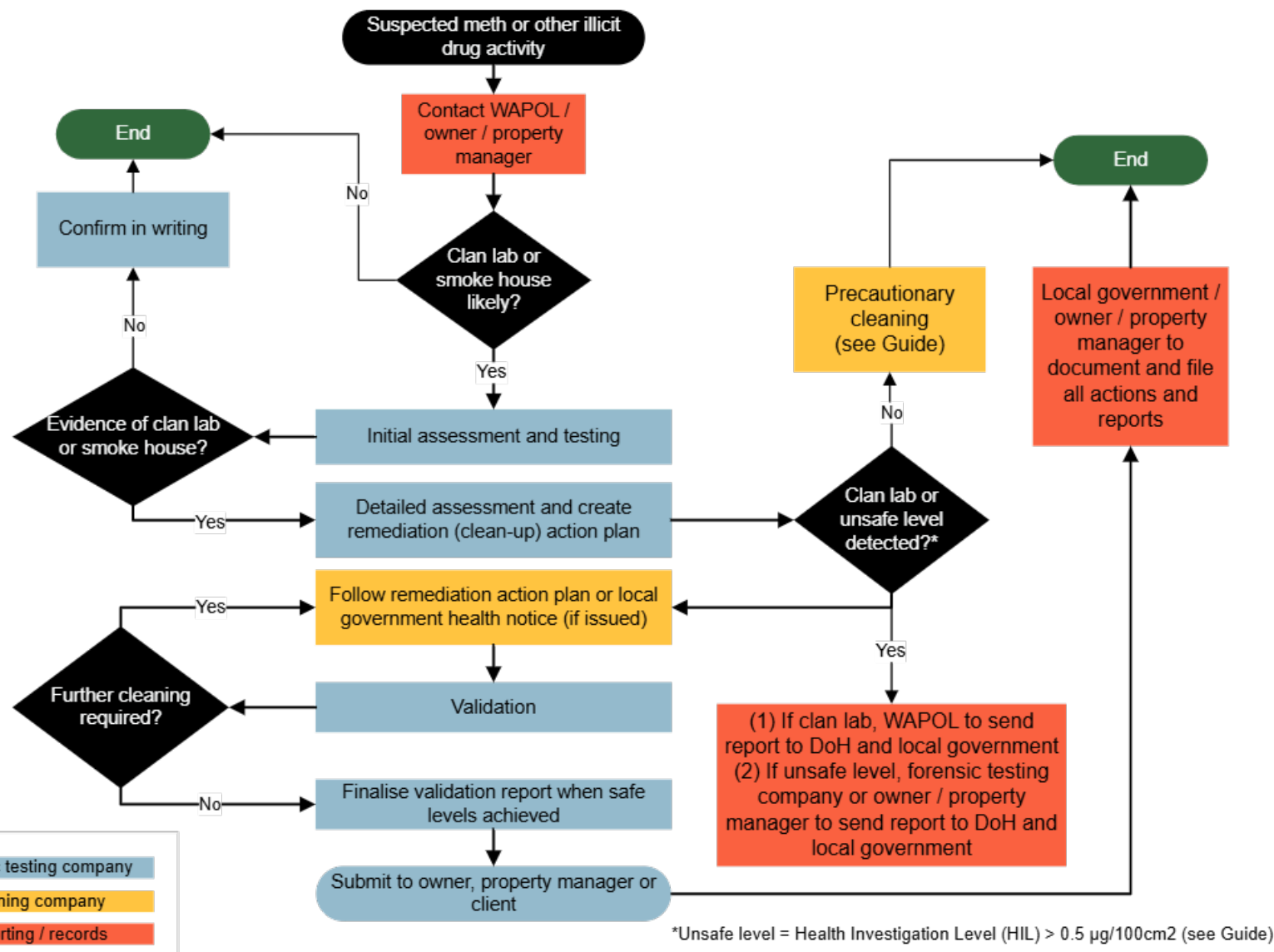
1. Independence statement	
This is a statement saying that the person checking the cleaning (the testing company) is not connected to the company that did the clean up (the cleaning contractor).	☐
2. Testing details	
This section explains how the testing was done to check if the clean up worked.	☐
3. Deviations and justifications	
If anything was done differently from the original clean up plan or the Guide for Testing and Remediation of Methamphetamine and Illicit Drug Residues in Residential Properties , it should be clearly explained, along with reasons why the changes were made.	☐
4. Results summary	
This part includes: • Where the tests were taken. • What the test results showed. • What quality checks were done. • What the results mean compared to Health Investigation Levels.	☐
5. Recommendations	
If the area is still too contaminated, more cleaning will be recommended. A plan for more testing will also be included.	☐
6. Clearance statement	
A final statement will be made by the cleaning company to say the area is safe.	☐

Testing and cleaning company responsibilities

When estimating or doing work, testing and cleaning companies should:

- only do work they are qualified for
- accurately interpret any drug residue levels
- ensure cleaning is appropriate and necessary for the level of contamination or risk
- consider what work is practical, keeping in mind the client's needs and safety principles
- avoid conflicts of interest, for example, the testing company should be different to the cleaning company.

Flow chart for managing drug contamination



Other types of drug contamination

Meth smoke houses

Houses where meth has been smoked are considered lower risk. However, it is recommended that testing is undertaken to determine the level of contamination that may be present. This will help to determine the level of cleaning needed to remove any chemicals that may be present on surfaces. Testing and cleaning work is generally simpler and less expensive than a meth lab.

Testing and clean up

You measure how much contamination has occurred by testing surfaces in the house. Testing should be done by a suitably qualified company. Use the [Checklist for Hiring Companies to Test or Clean Up Drug Contamination](#) to help you choose a reliable testing and cleaning company.

Testing and cleaning companies should follow the [Guide for Testing and Remediation of Methamphetamine and Illicit Drug Residues in Residential Properties](#). This guide will help you to understand the best practice requirements to be used by companies that test, clean up and validate a property following drug contamination to make a property safe to live in.

Depending on the level of contamination detected, a deep clean of impacted areas of the house may involve:

- washing all floors, counters, and lower walls several times using sugar soap, bleach, or an alkaline detergent
- vacuuming carpets and rugs
- steam cleaning (with hot water and detergent) carpets, rugs, sofas, or other soft furnishings
- machine washing curtains
- wiping down fixtures (power points, windowsills etc) using sugar soap, bleach, or an alkaline detergent
- cleaning filters on air conditioners
- removal of waste
- if in doubt, throw it out.

Cannabis grow houses

Houses where cannabis has been grown are considered a lower risk but still require a level of cleaning to remove any residues (chemicals or fertilisers) that may be present on surfaces.

Testing is generally not needed. However, if you are concerned you can hire a company to test surfaces before and/or after cleaning.

Cleaning may be done by the property owner or a professional cleaning company.

Cannabis grow houses may also require a qualified electrician or other trade to fix broken electrical items and other structural issues.

If hiring a cleaning company, make them aware of the potential risks.

Wear protective clothing such as gloves, old clothes and face mask, and dispose of after use.

A deep clean may involve cleaning impacted areas of the house:

- washing all floors, counters, and lower walls several times using sugar soap, bleach, or an alkaline detergent
- vacuuming carpets and rugs.
- steam cleaning (with hot water and detergent) carpets, rugs, sofas, or other soft furnishings
- machine washing curtains
- wiping down fixtures (power points, windowsills etc)
- cleaning filters on air conditioners
- removal of waste
- if in doubt, throw it out.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

© Department of Health 2026

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.

health.wa.gov.au