

Steroids Background

What's the issue?

Steroid use and abuse is a growing problem among California's students. According to the CIF, in 2003 close to 30,000 students in California had used steroids and over 9,000 students had used steroids in the past month. The problem is especially acute among high school athletes — the estimated number of CIF athletes using steroids is 20,315. Shockingly, many of the students stated that they knew of coaches who had distributed and promoted the use of steroids and other performance enhancing supplements. The CIF survey revealed that 18% of the boys and 7% of the girls surveyed were personally aware of coaches or other sports-related staff promoting the substances to student athletes.

Steroid abuse by teenagers is part of a larger societal problem. News headlines have been full of stories about steroids — Olympic athletes being stripped of medals and grand jury investigations of BALCO and superstar athletes. In response to these media reports, Congress held hearings in March 2005 about steroid abuse by professional athletes, many of whom are regarded as role models by high school students. Along with testimony from sports executives and players, the committee also heard from medical experts and parents whose children committed suicide after using steroids.

What are steroids?

Steroids are synthetic substances related to the male sex hormone. The proper medical term is anabolic/androgenic steroids, but anabolic is most commonly used. The substances promote growth of skeletal muscle (anabolic effect) and the development of male sexual characteristics (androgenic effect).

Steroids refer to a class of drugs. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, steroids are available legally only by prescription, to treat conditions that occur when the body produces abnormally low amounts of testosterone, such as delayed puberty and some types of impotence. They are also prescribed to treat body-wasting conditions in patients with AIDS and other diseases that result in loss of lean muscle mass.

Today, athletes and others abuse anabolic steroids to enhance performance and also to improve physical appearance. Anabolic steroids are taken orally or injected, typically in cycles of weeks or months (referred to as "cycling"), rather than continuously. Cycling involves taking multiple doses of steroids over a specific period of time, stopping for a period, and starting again. In addition, users often combine several different types of steroids to maximize their effectiveness while minimizing negative effects (referred to as "stacking").

What are the symptoms of steroid abuse?

In boys, common symptoms include:

- Rapid muscle growth
- Severe acne on shoulders, neck and face
- Premature balding
- Abnormal breast development
- Rage, aggressive behavior, violent temper and depression

Symptoms of steroid abuse in girls are:

- Rapid muscle growth
- Masculine features such as a deeper voice and an increase in body hair
- Severe acne and cysts
- Smaller breasts
- Fewer menstrual cycles
- Rage, aggressive behavior, violent temper and depression