

PATS KEY FINDINGS: Released July 23, 2014
2013 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation

New, nationally projectable survey results released today by the [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#) confirmed a significant increase – a doubling – in the reported lifetime use of synthetic human growth hormone (hGH) among teens. According to the latest Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), sponsored by [MetLife Foundation](#), 11 percent of teens in grades 9-12 reported “ever having used” synthetic human growth hormone* without a prescription, up dramatically from just 5 percent in 2012.

These findings underscore teens’ growing interest in performance enhancing substances, as well as the need for tighter regulation and more accurate labeling of “fitness-enhancing” over-the-counter products purported to contain synthetic hGH.

Concerning Findings About Teen Use of Synthetic hGH

- Steroid use among teens has also increased from 5 percent in 2009 to 7 percent in 2013.
- Both boys and girls report use of synthetic human growth hormone and steroids without a prescription. The PATS study found no significant difference between the proportion of teen boys vs. teen girls, who report using synthetic hGH 12 percent vs. 9 percent respectively.
- The PATS data show a strong correlation between the use of synthetic hGH and steroids. Currently, one in five teens (21 percent) reports that at least one friend uses steroids, and another one in five teens (21 percent) believes it is easy to obtain steroids; both of these measures improved in 2010 and have since remained consistent.

African-American, Hispanic Teens Report Using Synthetic hGH at Higher, Concerning Rates According to the New PATS Data

- African-American and Hispanic teens are more likely to report use of synthetic hGH, with 15 percent of African-American teens, 13 percent of Hispanic teens, and 9 percent of Caucasian teens saying they used synthetic hGH at least once within their lifetime.

Teen Awareness of Marketing of Performance-Enhancing Drugs Rises, Anti-Drug Attitudes Soften

- The new study data also found a marked increase in the percentage of teens who reported awareness of online marketing of steroids and synthetic hGH, up significantly from 17 percent in 2012 to 22 percent in 2013. Teens are also less likely to believe there is great or moderate risk in using performance-enhancing drugs compared to prior years, and those who do not perceive synthetic hGH or steroid use as a risky behavior are more likely to use these performance-enhancing substances.
- The PATS data confirm a significant year-to-year decline in the perceived risk (“great” or “moderate” risk) teens associate with using synthetic hGH without a doctor’s prescription (down from 86 percent in 2012 to 81 percent in 2013). The decline for perceived risk in steroid use is not as steep, but still statistically significant when compared to the past five years. In 2009, 85 percent of teens said there was great or moderate risk in using steroids, and 82 percent of teens currently share the same belief.
- The decrease for steroid risk is not as steep, but still statistically significant when looked at over the past five years. In 2009, 85 percent of teens said there was great or moderate risk in using steroids, and 82 percent of teens currently share the same belief.

Disconnect in Parent Communication with Their Kids About Synthetic hGH, Steroids

- More than half of parents (58 percent) report having discussed the use of steroids or other performance-enhancing substances (PES) with their teens, and only 3 percent of parents believe their teen has ever used steroids or other performance-enhancing substances.
- Only 12 percent of teens indicate that the last conversation they had with their parents about the risks of drug use included talking about synthetic hGH. This measure has remained stable over the past five years.

Other Trends in Teen Use: Marijuana, Prescription and OTC Medicine and Alcohol

Key Marijuana Findings:

- Almost half of teens (44 percent) report using marijuana at least once within their lifetime; more than one in three (36 percent) report using in the past year; one in four (24 percent) report using within the past month; and 7 percent report using at least 20 times within the past month. These levels have remained basically flat over the past five years.
- More than four in ten teens (41 percent) who have used marijuana started doing so before the age of 15. This is worrisome considering that those who initiate marijuana use at a younger age are more likely to use marijuana – as well as other substances – more frequently than those who begin using at an older age.
- Hispanic and African American teens are also more likely to report using marijuana than their Caucasian counterparts (with 52 percent, 54 percent, and 39 percent indicating use, respectively).

Key Prescription Drug Abuse & Over-The-Counter Cough Medicine Findings:

- Misuse and abuse of prescription medicine continues to be the third most prevalent drug abuse behavior among teens, following use of marijuana and alcohol. Almost one in four teens (23 percent) reports abusing or misusing a prescription drug at least once in their lifetime, and one in six (16 percent) reports doing so within the past year (as depicted below). In addition, Hispanic and African-American teens are more likely to report misusing or abusing prescription drugs compared to their Caucasian counterparts (with 27 percent, 29 percent, and 20 percent indicating use, respectively).
- One notable exception was over-the-counter cough medicine. Teens reported an increase in lifetime (“ever tried”) use of OTC cough medicine to get high – from 12 percent in 2012 to 15 percent in 2013. Past year and past month usage was unchanged.

Key Alcohol Findings:

- The new PATS data show that fewer teens report drinking alcohol in the past year or past month. Past-year alcohol use has declined significantly versus last year, from 57 percent in 2012 to 51 percent in 2013, and past-month alcohol use has declined gradually but significantly from 39 percent in 2009 to 35 percent in 2013.

* Human growth hormone occurs naturally in the body. Its primary function is to stimulate growth and cell production in children/adolescents, while helping regulate body composition, muscle and bone growth. Synthetic human growth hormone has been available since 1985. Congress specifically gave the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services the authority to approve medical uses of hGH and prohibited any off-label uses. The limited number of approved medical uses include: muscle-wasting disease associated with HIV/AIDS, adult deficiency due to rare pituitary tumors or their treatment, adult short bowel syndrome and long-term treatment of short stature in children and adolescents. Its illicit use (without a doctor’s prescription for an approved use) has been intended generally to mimic the muscle-building effects of anabolic steroids, with presumed benefits for both athletic performance and appearance.

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