

DIGITAL CITIZENS ALLIANCE REPORT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TAYLOR HOOTON FOUNDATION

**BETTER AT ANY COST: THE DANGEROUS INTERSECTION OF
YOUNG PEOPLE, STEROIDS, AND THE INTERNET**





INTRODUCTION

Our nation's sports headlines this summer were dominated by discussions of steroids and baseball, culminating with the suspension of more than a dozen major leaguers. It's a headline that's become common: superstar athletes resorting to illegal drugs to gain an advantage or secure a big multi-million dollar contract.

But it's those who are not in the headlines for taking steroids that should be most concerning to all of us.

- It's the teenager wanting a college scholarship, worried that he won't make his high school football team, who takes pills or injections to bulk himself up.
- Or the field hockey player, embarrassed that she can't keep up with her talented friends and desperate to make an impression.
- Also, the 15-year-old swimmer, who will settle for nothing less than a shot at a gold medal, who turns to steroids to keep her dream alive.
- Perhaps most troubling of all – it is every teenager who wants a flatter stomach or toned physique and feels they've found an easy way to get it.

They are rarely in the headlines. But for every Ryan Braun or Alex Rodriguez, there are thousands of youngsters who turn to appearance- and performance-enhancing drugs (APEDs) to achieve their goals of high-school stardom, playing a college sport, or simply to look better. They see drugs like steroids or human growth hormone (HGH) as the ticket to success. APEDs make them stronger, faster, and bigger—and the likely don't know the high price they could end up paying for this *"quick fix."*

The sheer volume of young people resorting to illegal drugs is troubling.

According to a Zogby Analytics poll recently commissioned by the Digital Citizens Alliance:

- Over 8 percent of males aged 18-25 reported that they have used anabolic steroids.
- Almost 28 percent reported that they knew someone who had taken APEDs, such as steroids or HGH.

It is the nature of youth to believe one is invincible, but the truth is otherwise. Steroids and other APEDs cause a myriad of health issues. They affect liver function, cause cardiovascular issues, lead to tumors in the liver and kidneys, and can negatively affect male and female reproductive systems. They can also wreak havoc on the mind at a time when teens are already grappling with strong emotions. And they can shorten overall life expectancy.

Take the case of Taylor Hooton. Taylor was a star high school pitcher who turned to steroids to get to the next level. Although the steroids bulked up his body, they wreaked havoc on his emotions until one day he hanged himself. His father, Don Hooton, has dedicated his life to trying to help other families avoid suffering his loss. (For Taylor's full story, please see page 5.)

High school and college students can find steroids very easily - at their local gym or from a friend. Increasingly, dangerous APEDs are easy to find online. The Internet has opened up a new avenue for young people to acquire illegal steroids. A simple Google search will return thousands of websites offering to sell steroids. Teenagers know how to find just what they think they need on YouTube, eBay and other websites their parents may not have even heard of. And the Internet provides an anonymity that is alluring to teens who may

THE STORY OF TAYLOR HOOTON

Taylor is just one of the stories of a young athlete whose life was derailed by the use of steroids. But it's a compelling story that every young athlete should know.

A month past his 17th birthday, Taylor Hooton killed himself. The authorities ruled the death a suicide by hanging. His parents and a doctor familiar with the case said they believe that Taylor's death was related to depression that he felt upon discontinuing the use of anabolic steroids. The sense of euphoria and aggression that accompany the use of steroids can be replaced by lethargy, loss of confidence, melancholy and hopelessness when a person stops using performance-enhancing drugs, doctors said.

"It's a pretty strong case that he was withdrawing from steroids and his suicide was directly related to that," said Dr. Larry W. Gibbons, president and medical director of the Cooper Aerobics Center, a leading preventive medicine clinic in Dallas. "This is a kid who was well liked, had a lot of good friends, no serious emotional problems. He had a bright future."

His father Don Hooton created the Taylor Hooton Foundation and dedicated his life to educating North America's young people about the dangers of anabolic steroids and other appearance and performance enhancing drugs. The foundation can be reached at <http://taylorhooton.org/>.

not want anyone to know they're "*cheating*": All it takes is a credit card and a computer and the drugs are available.

Just how easy is it to acquire illegal APEDs? Digital Citizens decided to find out. As part of our investigation, the organization was able to purchase drugs from websites that promoted themselves through videos on YouTube, a popular site for teens and pre-teens. During our investigation, we found hundreds of videos on YouTube promoting the illegal sale of steroids and APEDs.

Tragic decisions come when you combine motive with opportunity. This report examines the dangerous intersection between young people, steroids, and the Internet, in hopes that tomorrow's headlines can be different.

STERIODS AND YOUNG ATHLETES

Major League Baseball has made a serious commitment to rid the sport of drugs. But what lessons will young athletes take from the latest APED scandal enveloping some of MLB's players? Sure, thirteen pro ball players have been shamed. But they are athletes with multi-million-dollar contracts. To many young athletes, steroids may seem worth the risk because the headlines confirm that their favorite athlete made it to the top of their sport by using APEDs.

So how pervasive are steroids among young people? In July, the Digital Citizens Alliance asked both males aged 18 – 25 and parents with sons between the ages of 14 and 25 about steroid use. Here's what we found:

APEDs ARE DANGEROUS BUT YOUNG ATHLETES WILL USE THEM ANYWAY.

- **HIGH USAGE.** Thirty-six percent of males aged 18 – 25 said that they, or someone they know, had taken APEDs like steroids or HGH. In all, over 8 percent admitted that they themselves had taken APEDs.

Among parents, 6 percent said that they knew their son had taken steroids and an additional 10 percent said they knew someone else who had. One in 5 parents are worried that their child may take APEDs in the future.

- **RISKY.** Teens know the risks. Thirty-six percent of males aged 18-25 said that taking APEDs without a doctor's supervision was *"potentially life threatening"* and 55 percent said it was *"potentially harmful to overall health."* Less than 7 percent thought that APED usage was *"not very dangerous"* or *"not dangerous at all."*

PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES USING APEDS SEND A DANGEROUS MESSAGE TO YOUNG ATHLETES.

- **STEROID USE IS CRITICAL.** One in five males ages 18 – 25 said that taking APEDs is *"the only way to make it in professional sports."* An additional 24 percent said it was *"critical to enhancing one's athletic performance."*
- **PRESSURE IS ON.** A whopping 77 percent of males surveyed said that APED usage in professional sports *"puts pressure on young athletes to use drugs to get ahead."* Parents felt exactly the same.

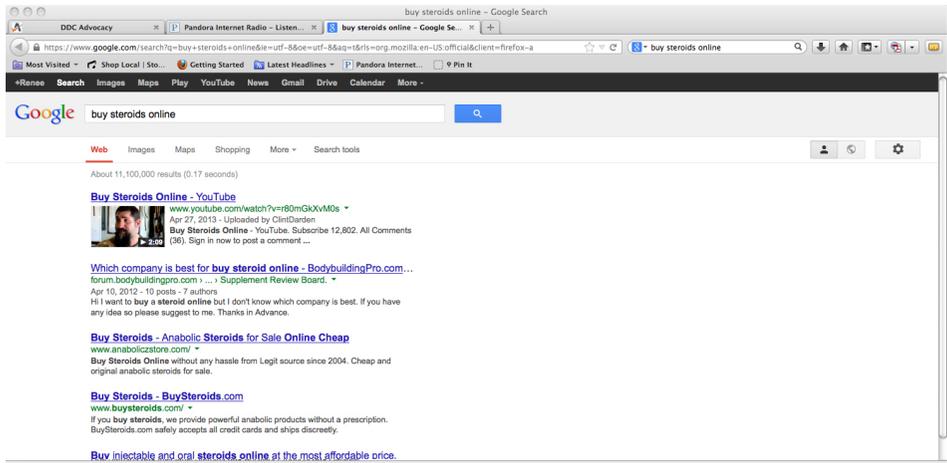
The findings in this Digital Citizens Alliance poll are consistent with other studies.

A recent study by the University of Minnesota revealed that 5.9 percent of boys in middle school and high school admitted to using anabolic steroids. That's in addition to the 4.6 percent of girls in that age group that admitted using them.

WHEN MOTIVE MEETS OPPORTUNITY

The Internet has made everything more accessible. In most cases, it serves as a valuable and helpful resource. In the case of steroids and other APEDs, however, it has opened the floodgates for teens to secretly gain access to dangerous drugs more easily than ever before.

A simple review of the search results on Google for “buy steroids online” underscores the issue. That search returns over 8 million results. While all of them are not for sites offering steroids for sale, the first page shows many are:



The screenshot shows a Google search for "buy steroids online" with the following results:

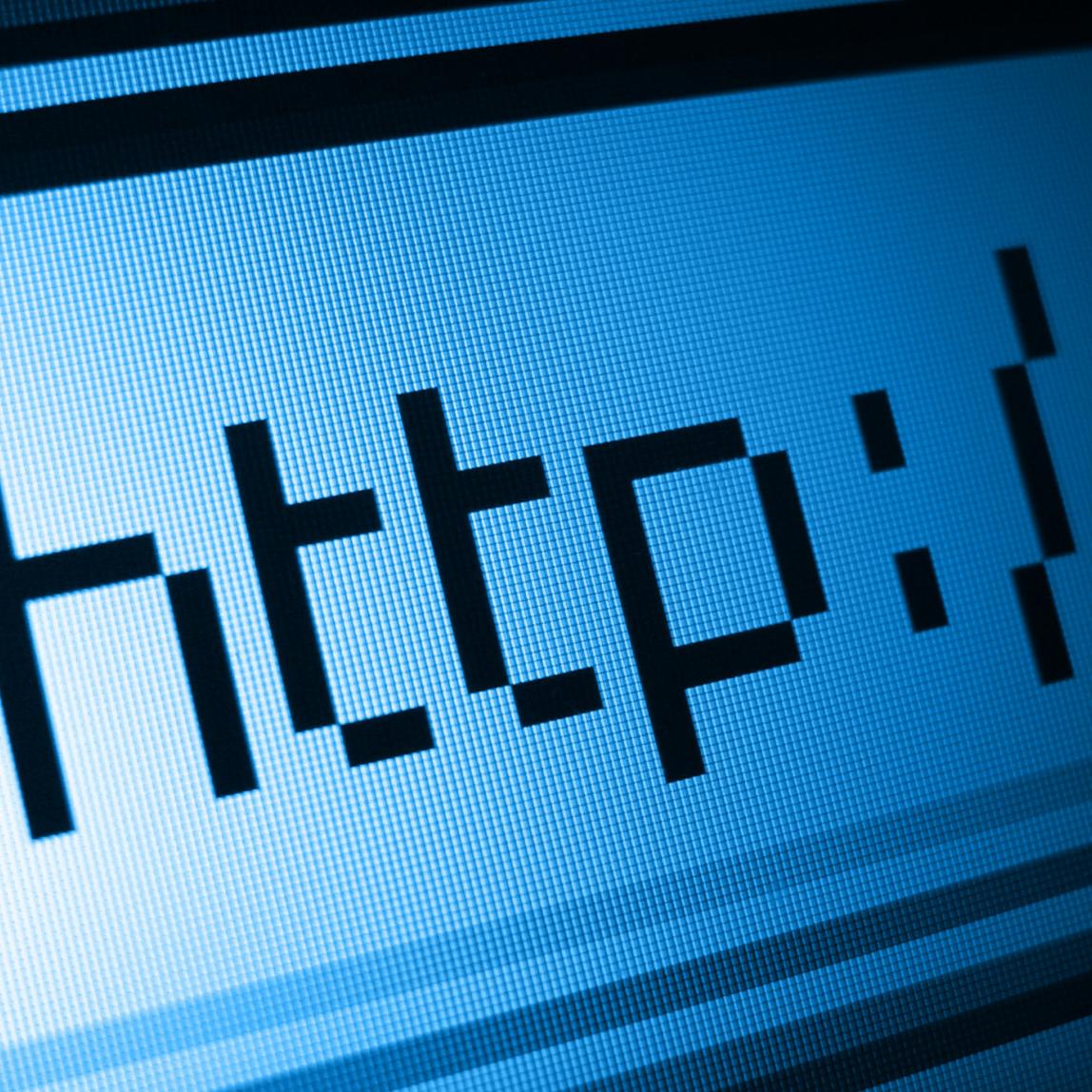
- Web** | Images | Maps | Shopping | More ▾ | Search tools
- About 11,100,000 results (0.17 seconds)
- Buy Steroids Online - YouTube**
 www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0mGloXMM0s
Apr 27, 2013 · Uploaded by ClintDarden
Buy Steroids Online - YouTube. Subscribe 12,802. All Comments (8). Sign in now to post a comment ...
- Which company is best for buy steroid online - BodybuildingPro.com...**
forum.bodybuilding.com / ... | Supplement Review Board.
Apr 10, 2012 - 10 posts - 7 authors
Hi I want to buy a steroid online but I don't know which company is best. If you have any idea so please suggest to me. Thanks in Advance.
- Buy Steroids - Anabolic Steroids for Sale Online Cheap**
www.anabolicstore.com/
Buy Steroids Online without any hassle from Legit source since 2004. Cheap and original anabolic steroids for sale.
- Buy Steroids - BuySteroids.com**
www.buysteroids.com/
If you buy steroids, we provide powerful anabolic products without a prescription. BuySteroids.com safely accepts all credit cards and ships discreetly.
- Buy injectable and oral steroids online at the most affordable price.**

It takes merely a few clicks to get to a site like this:



Buying drugs online poses several dangers. Taking any controlled substance without a prescription is always risky. First off, by circumventing a doctor's supervision, young people lose all of the safeguards that a trained medical professional provides. In addition, going around a pharmacist means that the drug user may not know how the drugs he or she is taking may react with other medication.

That is only part of the danger. While real APEDs are dangerous enough, there is no guarantee that drugs purchased without prescriptions from online merchants (the Black Market) are real. The Taylor Hooton Foundation has found that Black Market APEDs commonly contain contaminants such as lead



and other heavy metals; liquid mixers such as cooking oil, horse urine, and other filthy contents; and other dangerous substances. Any merchant who is willing to sell drugs illegally online should not be trusted.

What is also concerning is how Black Market merchants have turned to popular websites for teens and pre-teens to market steroids and other APEDs. Earlier this year, Digital Citizens looked at how YouTube had become infested with videos promoting websites offering access to prescription drugs such as Percocet, Tramadol, and Codeine without a prescription. What was equally disturbing was that Google was running ads in connection with videos promoting these illegally obtained prescription drugs.

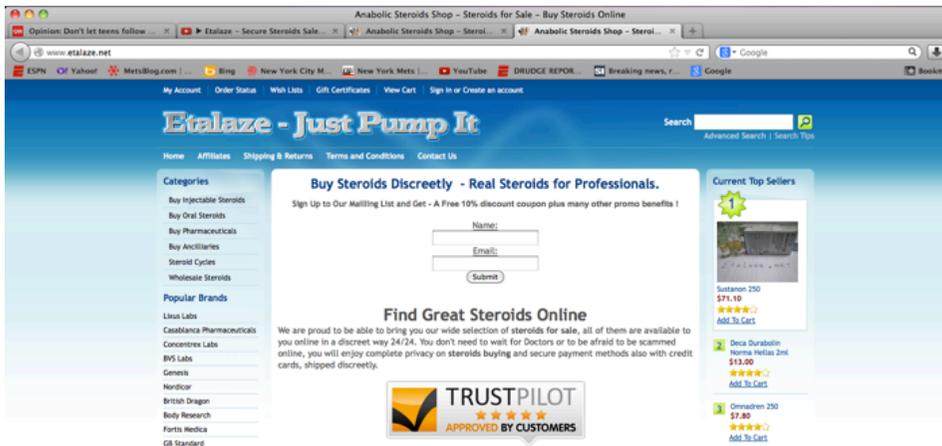
After media scrutiny, Google removed hundreds—if not thousands—of videos that promoted prescription drugs illegally. While that was laudable, a review of YouTube found that the popular site continues to be a venue for videos promoting the purchase of steroids. We have not heard if Google has come up with a permanent solution to prevent either the drug videos from coming back or advertising on videos from rogue operators.

THE DIGITAL CITIZENS STEROID INVESTIGATION

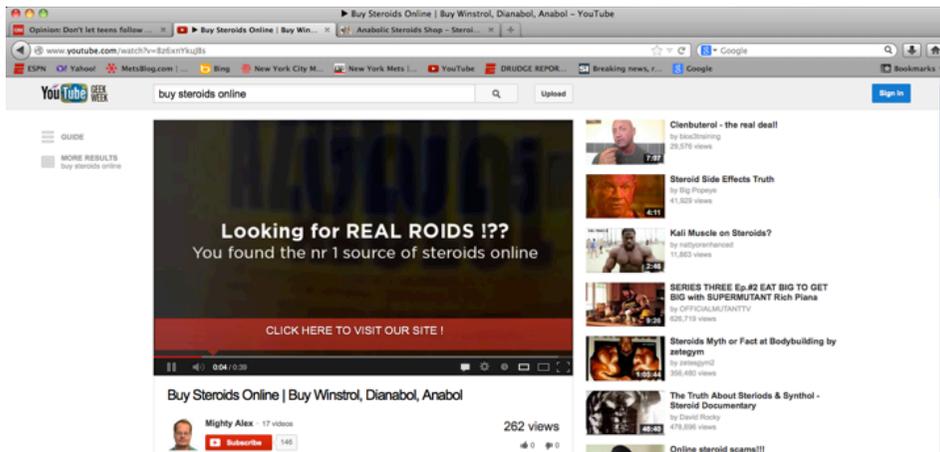
As part of our investigation, Digital Citizens purchased APEDs from websites that promoted themselves on YouTube. Digital Citizens purchased the drugs after seeing videos with scenes like this:



This video led Digital Citizens to the following website:



The second Digital Citizens purchase was prompted by this video on YouTube:



This led us to their website:



The vendors selling these products could alter the route Digital Citizens' researchers took to make the purchases. Look for updates on changes to this path on the Digital Citizens' website: <http://www.digitalcitizensalliance.org>

Digital Citizens was able to purchase these APEDs with a few simple clicks and a credit card. They arrived within weeks and were sent to Microtrace LLC Lab for testing.

TESTING RESULTS

The two packages came to a Maryland location through U.S. Mail, one from Thailand (the steroid) the other from Slovakia (the HGH). The packages were opened at Microtrace's facility in Elgin, Illinois. Inside the package from Thailand was the product from Etalaze.net, which Microtrace confirmed was a steroid known as Deca Durabolin®. It was produced by a Pakistani company, Pharmatec Pakistan.

However, Microtrace's testing told a much different story for the alleged HGH. The product purchased from steroidcraze.com came wrapped in a box with a label indicating it contained Somatropin (r-DNA origin). That product is produced by a Shanghai-based company called PharmChemical. However, testing showed that in fact the product was not HGH. Don Hooton from the Taylor Hooton Foundation noticed a red flag when he learned Digital Citizens paid \$130 for the product. HGH, which is harvested from human cadavers, usually costs around \$2,000.

WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN FOR DIGITAL CITIZENS

Our research shows a crackdown is needed on the APED pushers that take advantage of the developing Internet marketplace to sell steroids alongside legitimate and legal products. Reining in these Black Market traffickers is critical to protect the next generation of American athletes. According to published reports, the lab at the heart of the recent baseball scandal, Biogenesis, had documentation showing it not only provided APEDs to millionaire professional athletes, but to high school and college athletes as well.

LAWMAKERS

Criminals know teens are the emerging market for APEDs suppliers. In fact, if the professional leagues do crack down on players, then these suppliers may become even more dependent on the teen market. Lawmakers would be wise to consider harsh deterrents for those who operate in the darkest corners of the Internet, targeting our young athletes.

INTERNET COMPANIES

Once again, Digital Citizens calls on Google, and any Internet venue exploited by unscrupulous merchants, to take greater steps to police their sites for dangerous drugs, including steroids and other APEDs. In the case of YouTube, Google could accomplish a lot simply by isolating videos with the title or description *“buy steroids online.”*

Google should also immediately cease advertising on videos promoting dangerous drugs. On many of the YouTube videos promoting steroids, Google has placed ads – usually to the right and in yellow or embedded in the video. By running ads on these videos, Google is directly profiting from bad actors peddling dangerous drugs.

CAREGIVERS

While lawmakers and Internet companies need to do more, the first line of defense is, as always, parents and caregivers.

If they don't already, parents should understand the dangers steroids pose. According to the Zogby Analytics poll commissioned by Digital Citizens, 76 percent of parents believe that APEDs are just as or more dangerous than cocaine.

Knowing the dangers of teen drug use, including APEDs, pay attention to Internet and credit card use. Many teenagers have credit cards, which can easily be used to purchase APEDs online.

It's also vital that teenagers regularly hear about why they shouldn't be using APEDs. To use them is cheating, they are illegal to possess without a prescription, and they can do serious damage to teens' bodies and their minds. It's a sad fact that if they play high school or college sports, these youth probably already know of someone who has taken APEDs. Don't assume it's someone else's problem.

Most important, don't ignore the warning signs, even if it leads to a tough conversation. Make sure your teens know the dangers and know you are more concerned about their well-being than their success in sports or popularity. For more information on how to recognize the warning signs of teens using steroids, as well as tips on how to talk to your teens, visit the Taylor Hooton Foundation website.

FAILED PROMISES

Clearly the greatest dangers are those that affect your health, but Digital Citizens also found sites that won't even bother with producing a package containing real or fake substances. Half of the drugs Digital Citizens researchers ordered ended with no shipment ever arriving - despite being paid for. In other words, we were ripped off. If this happens to you, you have virtually no chance of recovering your money or getting help from law enforcement. So buyer beware: if you order online, chances are good you end up with a bad substance or no substance at all for parting with your hard earned money.

CONCLUSION

Steroids didn't become available because of the Internet. But they have become more available through it. Ultimately, it's up to all of us to combat the problem.

Parents must be vigilant and be on the watch for evidence of steroid use. The current controversy over Major League Baseball players getting suspended can provide an opening for parents to broach the subject with their teens who may be at risk. The MLB's example of cracking down on players and actively working to stop the spread of APEDs among its athletes can also help point to the seriousness of the issue and how more of us can do more to fight illegal steroid use.

In addition, we need our great Internet companies to take a greater stand against steroid peddlers using their platforms to offer dangerous drugs. As mentioned, Google improving how it polices YouTube for videos promoting APEDs would be a great step forward in promoting Internet safety.

What happens at the intersection of teens, APEDs, and the Internet is another example of how we must come together—consumers, industry, and civic leaders—and work harder to make both our online and offline communities safe for our children's future.



www.digitalcitizensalliance.org



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