

## Commentary

Revised April 22, 2013

### *Students Subject to Random Drug Testing Use Drugs Less Than Students Not Subject to Testing in Same Schools*

A study conducted by the Institute for Behavior and Health, Inc., funded by the U.S. Department of Education,<sup>a</sup> and published in the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse* shows students in schools with random student drug testing (RSDT) programs who knew they were subject to random testing and expected to be tested in the coming school year reported significantly less marijuana and other illegal drug use than students who knew they were not subject to testing.<sup>1</sup>

Anonymous self-report student surveys were conducted bi-annually over a three year period among eight high schools with well-established RSDT programs. In all schools, athletes and in five schools, students in extracurricular activities, were subject to RSDT; however, based on student surveys it was clear that many students did not know of their status in these programs. Based on student survey responses, researchers identified two subsets of students: those who knew they were in their schools drug testing pool and aware they could be randomly drug tested (Tested) and students who knew they were not in the testing pool and not subject to random testing (Not Tested).

Significantly fewer students in the Tested group reported past month use of marijuana and other illicit drugs (cocaine, opiates and amphetamine/methamphetamine)<sup>b</sup> than students in the Not Tested group: 26.3% of Not Tested students reported past month marijuana use and 12.6% of Tested students used marijuana in this time. Similarly, 14.0% of Not Tested students used any of the other three illicit drugs while 8.5% of Tested students reported use of these drugs. Similar differences were found among groups for past year use of drugs, with Tested students reporting significantly less drug use than Not Tested students.

Differences in self-reported rates of past month and past year drug use among Tested and Not Tested students were consistent within each grade, with significantly fewer Tested students in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades reporting drug use than their Not Tested peers.

Groups did not differ in reported rates of past month alcohol use: 38.5% of all Not Tested students reported past month alcohol use compared to 37.1% of Tested students. No differences were found among groups for past year alcohol use. Only one school tested students for alcohol and thus, was excluded from these analyses.

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<sup>a</sup> This study was part of a demonstration project funded from 2003-2007 by the U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>b</sup> Random drug test panels for all schools included marijuana, cocaine, opiates and amphetamine/methamphetamine.

Because many opponents of RSDT programs suggest that students subject to testing are typically less likely to use drugs because of school involvement (i.e. participation in athletics or extracurricular activities acts as a preventive measure), researchers examined differences between Tested and Not Tested students engaged in extracurricular activities.

Tested/Extracurricular students reported significantly less past month marijuana use (11.9%) than Not Tested/Extracurricular students (19.1%). No differences were found for past month alcohol or other illegal drug use. No differences were found for past year alcohol or other illegal drug use.

This study provides evidence for the efficacy of RSDT in reducing rates of drug use when students are aware that they are subject to random testing and believe they are likely to be tested. It is worthy of note that the differences in past month and past year drug use among Tested and Not Tested students were not found for alcohol use, quite possibly because schools did not include alcohol on testing panels. The study also provides evidence that students subject to testing have more positive attitudes towards testing and their school's drug and alcohol policies than students not subject to testing. More than half (54.5%) of Tested students reported that drug testing made them want to avoid drugs compared to 26.7% of Not Tested students. The significant difference between Tested/Extracurricular and Not Tested/Extracurricular students in past marijuana use suggests that random student drug testing may further reduce marijuana use among this population.

RSDT is not a stand-alone prevention program but rather one part of a school's comprehensive prevention program.<sup>2</sup> Because so few students actually are tested due to cost and administrative constraints, the study suggests that to ensure maximum effectiveness, existent and future RSDT programs should be aware that it is important for students to know that they are participants in school random drug testing pools.

For more information on the Institute for Behavior and Health, Inc. visit [www.IBHinc.org](http://www.IBHinc.org).  
For information about random student drug testing visit [www.PreventionNotPunishment.org](http://www.PreventionNotPunishment.org).  
For information about the harmful effects of drug use by teens visit [www.PreventTeenDrugUse.org](http://www.PreventTeenDrugUse.org).

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<sup>1</sup> DuPont, R. L., Campbell, M. D., Campbell, T. G., Shea, C. L., & DuPont, H. S. (2013). Self-reported drug and alcohol use and attitudes toward drug testing in high school with random student drug testing. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 22(2), 104-119.

<sup>2</sup> DuPont, R. L., Merlo, L. J., Arria, A. M., & Shea, C. L. (2013). Random student drug testing as a school-based drug prevention strategy. *Addiction*, 108(5), 839-845.