

# Children taking illegal steroids to excel in sports, study finds

CHICAGO (AP) — Some boys and girls as young as 10 are taking illegal steroids to do better in sports, according to the first survey to look at use of the bodybuilding drugs as early as fifth grade.

The survey found that 2.7 percent of 965 youngsters questioned at four Massachusetts middle schools are using anabolic steroids.

Experts said that represents a significant problem.

"We have thought that it has been a problem primarily of high school and college students," said Dr. Robert W. Blum, professor of pediatrics and director of adolescent health at the University of Minnesota.

Besides building muscles, steroids can harm the liver, stunt

growth and cause a host of other long-term ailments.

In some cases, coaches and parents may be buying steroids on the black market and then passing them along to the child athletes.

"A cycle of steroids costs a few hundred dollars," said University of Massachusetts researcher Avery Faigenbaum, whose study was published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*. "I don't know a lot of 10-year-olds who have a couple of hundred dollars. I think we have to look at parents, I think we have to look at youth coaches."

Dr. Charles E. Yesalis, a Pennsylvania State University expert on steroids, said: "This sounds the

klaxon. It's a warning to parents, doctors and school administrators."

While high school students have been surveyed, and Yesalis has surveyed seventh-graders, researchers said this is the first survey to focus on the problem down to fifth grade.

Experts said that there was no reason to doubt that the results of the anonymous survey taken with

teachers absent were accurate. Yesalis said they were shocked, I'm sorry to say."

A major finding was that among middle-school girls, steroid use was most prevalent as it was in boys. Steroid use was reported by 2.8 percent of boys and 2.5 percent of girls.

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