

STASH Vol. 3(5) - Internet based home-drug tests: Parents use questionable means to test their teens

June 20, 2007

The Internet is an unregulated marketplace for drugs and drug-testing products. In the last issues of *STASH* [3\(3\)](#), [3\(4\)](#), we reviewed studies examining Internet accessibility of illicit drugs (e.g., opioids, ecstasy), and Internet information about these illicit drugs. Internet sites also make available products that claim to test illicit drug use. This week's *STASH* reports a study that examined whether Internet based home-drug testing sites provide complete and accurate information for parents who decide to test their teenagers' for drug use (Levy, Van Hook, & Knight, 2004).

Levy, Van Hook, and Knight (2004) conducted Internet searches for home drug-testing and selected for further analyses eight sites containing parental advice sections. Two of the authors reviewed the content of each site and noted the product claims, the possibility of inaccuracy, as well as advice to the parents concerning follow-up procedures.

Table 1 shows that all eight of the home drug testing kits claimed that their products would reveal whether a child used drugs, but only three discussed the potential for *false negative* or *false positive* findings. The majority of the sites claimed that home drug testing can reduce the effects of peer pressure. One site explicitly warned parents not to test their children without consent. Half of the sites stressed the importance of parents consulting a medical professional about test results and/or teen behavior.

		<i>n</i>
Indication	Claims to determine for sure whether child is using drugs	8
	Claims to decrease peer pressure to use drugs	7
Knowledge & Consent	Contains vague statement regarding child's consent	4
	Warns not to test teen without consent	1
Collection	Includes a discussion of adulteration or test for adulteration*	3
Follow-up for positive test	Recommends seeking professional help/obtain formal diagnosis	4
Follow-up for negative test	Recommends testing if drug use is suspected	2

*the corruption of a sample to assure a negative result

Figure. Content of Internet based Home Drug-testing Sites (Adapted from Levy, Van Hook, & Knight (2004, p. 724). Click image to enlarge.

This study has some limitations. The current study only reviews home drug-testing websites with specific parental advice sections; consequently, these sites might not be representative of all of Internet home drug-testing websites. Although this study employed a small sample, the findings suggest that many Internet-based home drug-testing kits do not provide parents with essential information, for example, about the risks of false positive and false negative tests, specimen collection procedures, or the importance of consulting a health professional.

Given the complex nature of drug testing, health professionals should advise parents of the limitations and risks associated with these tests. Similarly, parents who choose to purchase these products should use extreme caution. Finally the results of this study suggest a need to regulate these and similar sites that claim to provide health related information and resources.

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

References

Levy, S., Van Hook, S., & Knight, J. (2004). A Review of Internet-Based Home Drug-Testing Products for Parents. *Pediatrics*, 113(4), 720-726.