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## N.J. set to drug-test high school athletes

*Program to screen random competitors for about 80 banned substances*

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TRENTON, N.J. - High school athletes seeking to hoist championship trophies next year may also have to hold an altogether different kind of cup starting this fall.

The Garden State is set to become the first in the nation to institute a drug-testing policy for high school athletes.

Created to test for performance-enhancing drugs, the program will likely screen random athletes for about 80 banned substances ranging from amphetamines to steroids.

Public and private school students competing in championship games, either individually or as part of teams, will be subject to the tests.

The state's school athletic association gave preliminary approval to the plan earlier this week and is slated to make a final decision June 7.

The organization estimates that about 500 of the 10,000 students competing in state tournaments each year will be tested.

"It's the right thing to do, because taking steroids would be cheating. And 10 years down the road it would cause harm to your health. And, as a teenager, you don't think of your health," said state Sen. Richard Codey, who pushed the plan while serving as governor last year.

Students who do not agree to the testing will not be allowed to compete.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 6.1 percent of U.S. high school students in 2003 took steroids without a prescription at least once.

A similar New Jersey survey that year indicated that 3.1 percent of the state's public high school students had tried steroids at least once.

Across the country, the use of performance-enhancing drugs seems to be growing in areas where athletic programs are highly competitive, said Gary Makowicki, an athletic director at a Norwich, Conn., school who serves as executive director of the National High School Athletic Coaches Association.

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