

Karleen Jackson
Commissioner
P.O. Box 110601
Juneau, AK 99011-0601
www.hss.state.ak.us



Sherry Hill
*Assistant Commissioner
for Public Affairs*
907.465.1618
cell: 907.321.2838
sherry.hill@alaska.gov

Fact Sheet

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Nov. 19, 2007

Fact Sheet: 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

What is the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)?

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is part of an epidemiological surveillance system that was established in 1990 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It was developed to monitor health risk behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. These behaviors, often established during childhood and early adolescence, include:

- Tobacco use;
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors;
- Inadequate physical activity;
- Alcohol and other drug use;
- Sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection; and
- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence.

What are the purposes of the YRBS?

- Determine the prevalence of health risk behaviors;
- Assess whether health risk behaviors increase, decrease, or stay the same over time;
- Provide comparable national, state and local data;
- Provide comparable data among subpopulations of youth; and
- Monitor progress toward achieving the Healthy People 2010 objectives and other program indicators.

How long has Alaska participated in the YRBS?

The YRBS high school survey was first implemented at the national level in 1990. Since that time CDC has sponsored national surveys from 1991 to the present on an every-other-year basis. Alaska first participated in the YRBS in 1995 and obtained representative statewide data. Due to external factors, the YRBS was not administered in 1997. It was administered in 1999; however the Anchorage School District did not participate. Without Anchorage the data were not representative of the state as a whole. The survey was administered in 2001, but unfortunately low student response rates rendered the data unusable. A major obstacle in 2001 was the constraint of the active parental consent law that had just gone into effect. In 2003 the survey was administered statewide with active parental consent and representative data were obtained, making this

the first statewide YRBS representative sample since 1995. The survey was again administered in 2005, however the response rate fell just below the target and the data was not used. In 2007, the survey was administered and achieved an adequate response rate, yielding important survey results.

What is the difference between active and passive consent?

Alaska's active parental consent law, AS 14.03.110, prohibits public schools from administering surveys or questionnaires that ask about personal or family affairs, or anything else that is not a matter of public record or readily observable in public, without first getting written permission from all participating students' parents or legal guardians. This law holds regardless of whether the surveys are anonymous and voluntary. Alaska is one of only a few states in the nation that has a school survey law requiring active parental consent for surveys of this type. Most states employ passive parental consent when administering such anonymous surveys. Passive parental consent involves notifying and informing the parents about the survey and assuming that students will participate unless the parent provides a written refusal to opt out of the survey.

How was the YRBS conducted?

A two-stage sample design was used to select the actual students for participation. The first stage consisted of selecting schools. Schools were selected with probability proportional to the size of their enrollment. Once a school was selected, classes were selected as the second stage. Eligible classes were those where a student would be enrolled in one and only one class at a time. For example second period or required English. This gave each student an equal opportunity of being selected. At any time a school district, an individual school, a student's parents, or a specific student had the opportunity to decline participation.

At the classroom level, teachers were given a script to read to students that established guidelines for student privacy and anonymity and the importance of the survey. Each student was given an unmarked envelope in which to seal his or her survey before turning it in. These survey envelopes remained sealed until received at a central state collection site. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a CDC contractor analyzed the state survey data.

A national YRBS also was conducted in 2007, however, the results will not be available until early summer 2008. As a result, 2005 National YRBS results are being used for comparison purposes.

Who participated in the survey?

Forty one high schools from 19 districts were scientifically selected to be included in the survey. Thirty-eight (88 percent) schools participated and 1,318 (68 percent) students completed the survey resulting in an overall response rate of 60 percent. The CDC has determined that the overall response rate must be 60 percent or greater in order for the data to represent the high school population of the state. Therefore, these survey results represent 34,399 students grades 9 through 12 in public high schools (excluding private, alternative, boarding and correctional schools).

How are the data used?

The results of the YRBS are used to detect changes in risk behaviors over time and provide an important piece of program planning and evaluation, curriculum development and decision-making regarding the use of available resources. The information from the YRBS can be used to help schools and communities identify strengths and weaknesses in current programs and services. Additionally the results can be used by schools and communities when applying for grant funding to initiate or maintain programs that serve youth.

Who supported the YRBS in Alaska?

The YRBS in Alaska is a cooperative effort between the state departments of Health and Social Services and Education and Early Development. The survey is also endorsed by the following groups and boards:

- Association of Alaska School Boards
- Alaska Action for Healthy Kids
- All Alaska Pediatric Partnership
- American Heart Association, Pacific/Mountain Affiliate
- American Lung Association of Alaska
- American Cancer Society, Alaska
- Alaska Health Education Consortium
- Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance
- Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Contact: Greg Wilkinson, HSS, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032
Ann Potempa, HSS, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 240-9158
Eric Fry, EED, (907) 465-2851

#