

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

A Vital Tool for CDC Winnable Battles



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is the nation's premier system of health surveys that collect state data about U.S. residents regarding their health-related risk behaviors and events, chronic health conditions, and use of preventive services. The largest continuously conducted multi-mode (mail, landline phone, and cell phone) health survey in the world, BRFSS is administered in all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia and three U.S. territories.

Ongoing since 1984, BRFSS serves as a major source of information about health-related risk behaviors associated with the leading causes of death in America. For many states, it is the only source of state-based health information.

BRFSS is a state-based surveillance system administered by the Division of Behavioral Surveillance in CDC's Public Health Surveillance and Informatics Program Office; Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services.



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BRFSS and CDC Winnable Battles

Winnable battles are public health priorities where CDC and our public health partners can make significant progress in improving health outcomes in a relatively short time frame—generally within 1 to 4 years. Currently, CDC has identified the following domestic winnable battles with a substantial focus on prevention:

- healthcare-associated infections;
- HIV;
- motor vehicle injuries;
- nutrition, physical activity, obesity, and food safety;
- teen pregnancy; and
- tobacco.

BRFSS provides valuable information on health behaviors associated with many CDC Winnable Battles. For example, BRFSS data show which parts of the country and which population groups are most at risk from certain public health diseases and conditions. BRFSS also helps federal, state, and local health officials track progress toward winning these battles.



Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology and Laboratory Services
Division of Behavioral Surveillance



Some BRFSS Questions Related to CDC Winnable Battles

HIV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been tested for HIV? • Not including blood donations, in what month and year was your last HIV test?
Motor Vehicle Injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you use seat belts when you drive or ride in a car?
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the past month, not counting juice, how many times per day, week, or month did you eat fruit?
Physical Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the past month, other than your regular job, did you participate in any physical activities or exercises such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening, or walking for exercise?
Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About how much do you weigh without shoes? • About how tall are you without shoes?
Tobacco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you now smoke cigarettes every day, some days, or not at all? • During the past 12 months, have you stopped smoking for 1 day or longer because you were trying to quit smoking?

BRFSS in Action

As a state-based system, BRFSS provides prevalence estimates for health-related risk behaviors and chronic conditions at the state, county, and regional level. Federal, state, and local governments use this information to develop and implement public health policies, initiate public health intervention programs, and track progress toward achieving public health goals.

States use BRFSS to help address CDC Winnable Battles; the following activities are examples:

- identifying behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes that place individuals at higher risk for contracting HIV (Rhode Island);
- developing data-driven grant proposals for CDC programs and federal block grants by using data on cardiovascular disease prevention, nutrition, tobacco control, and physical activity (Virginia);
- providing data to support a legislative measure that allows the state health department to spend 25% of the state's tobacco settlement money on disease prevention and healthy lifestyle promotion related to physical activity, nutrition, and smoking cessation (Hawaii); and
- providing county estimates for local public health departments on the number of adults with risk factors related to smoking, using smokeless tobacco, binge drinking, not wearing seat belts, obesity, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, and heart disease (Wyoming).

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