

YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

DATA SUMMARY & TRENDS REPORT
2009-2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2009–2019* provides the most recent surveillance data on health behaviors and experiences among high school students in the US related to four priority areas associated with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, and unintended teen pregnancy: ***Sexual Behavior, High-Risk Substance Use, Experiencing Violence, and Mental Health and Suicide.***

This report is developed every other year by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH). DASH’s mission is to strengthen schools, families, and communities to prevent HIV, STDs, and unintended pregnancy and help youth become healthy, successful adults. To accomplish this mission, DASH

- ✓ Maintains high-quality surveillance systems.
- ✓ Translates scientific research on what works to help youth.
- ✓ Supports school districts in implementing quality health education.
- ✓ Establishes systems that connect students to health and behavioral services.
- ✓ Helps to create safer and more supportive school environments.

DASH also plays a vital role in promoting practices that help youth achieve good mental health and in supporting schools as they prepare youth to live healthier, more successful lives.



WHY CDC FOCUSES ON FOUR PRIORITY AREAS

Health risk behaviors and experiences related to sexual behavior, high-risk substance use, violence, and poor mental health and suicide contribute to substantial health problems for adolescents, including risk for HIV, STDs, and unintended teen pregnancy. Consequences of these risks extend beyond health, as adolescent substance use, risky sexual behavior, and experiencing violence impact academic achievement and thus future occupational and financial opportunities that are intertwined with health in adulthood.



WHAT IS NEW?

Three new behaviors are included in this version of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: recent prescription opioid misuse, STD testing, and HIV testing. CDC collected data on STD testing and recent opioid misuse for the first time in 2019.

This report also provides data on health behaviors of sexual minority youth from three consecutive Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) cycles, allowing trends to be reported for the first time. CDC is committed to leveraging surveillance systems to be responsive to new and emerging issues facing the nation’s youth.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention



ORGANIZATION OF THE YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY DATA SUMMARY & TRENDS REPORT

The *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2009–2019* is organized into five chapters. The first four correspond to the four priority focus areas associated with HIV, STDs, and unintended teen pregnancy. They are:

- 1 **sexual behavior,**
- 2 **high-risk substance use,**
- 3 **experiencing violence,** and
- 4 **mental health and suicide.**

A fifth chapter focuses on sexual minority youth, defined in this report as those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; who are not sure of their sexual identity; or who have sexual contact with persons of the same or both sexes. All chapters provide trend data on key topic area indicators (when available), and all chapters except the sexual minority youth chapter (due to small sample population sizes) provide information on differences by sex and race/ethnicity. The sexual minority youth chapter examines key indicator variables by sexual identity and by sex of sexual contacts. Each chapter of this report includes summary findings.

All chapters of this report contain tables broadly categorizing trends as

-  **green**
(moving in the right direction),
-  **yellow**
(no change), or
-  **red**
(moving in the wrong direction).

Red trends highlight areas needing decisive intervention. While many green categories show that empowered adolescents are making good choices, the red categories show where adolescents are not receiving sufficient support

from adults, their communities, and society at large. Many of the red categories represent experiences beyond individual control, but these experiences could be prevented through school, community, and family support. This approach shows that while progress has been made in multiple categories, there is much work to be done to ensure that adolescents have the support they need to mature into healthy, successful adults.



KEY FINDINGS

In a number of areas, particularly **regarding sexual behavior and high-risk substance use, trends over time are improving** and moving in the right direction. These include **declines** in the percentage of students who **ever had sex, had four or more sex partners, are currently sexually active, or ever used or injected drugs**. These behaviors have important implications for health and well-being, and these improvements show that American youth can and are making better choices for their lives.

On the other hand, experiences of violence, such as **bullying (both electronically and at school) and forced sex, remain high** among youth, and trends in these experiences also remain flat. More can be done to create safe environments for youth.

Some trends are moving in the **wrong direction**. **Condom use** among youth **has declined** for the past decade, which is cause for concern. As STD rates increase among young people in the US, lack of condom use leaves many adolescents vulnerable to HIV and other STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis.

Of significant concern is that student reports of **negative mental health and safety issues continue to increase**. A growing percentage of students surveyed reported that they **did not go to school because of safety concerns**. An increasing percentage of American youth **felt sad or hopeless for at least two weeks** to the degree that they could not engage in their usual activities. The percentage of students **who seriously considered suicide or made a suicide plan also increased significantly** in the last decade. These trends show that adolescents are critically in need of adult support in addressing safety and mental health issues, problems which are largely beyond an adolescent's control.

While these trends apply to all high school students in the US, closer examination reveals that subsets of students have very different experiences, some better and some worse. Unfortunately, **stark disparities were found in all key health risk behaviors between sexual minority students and their peers**. Most **risk behaviors and experiences** were found to be **higher in sexual minority youth** than among heterosexual youth and those who did not have same sex partners, especially regarding **substance use, experiencing violence, and suicide behaviors**.

Since YRBS started collecting data in 2015 to help describe these disparities, large differences have been observed in factors that put lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth at higher risk than their heterosexual peers.

Since 2015, most trends in these factors have remained flat, showing little to no improvement. There were a few notable exceptions and the directions of these trends were mixed:

-  The percentage of **LGB youth** who experienced **physical dating violence significantly decreased**.
-  Among **students who had any sexual contact with people of the same sex**, the percentage who were **threatened or injured with a weapon or who did not go to school because of safety concerns significantly increased**.
-  **Of those students who had sexual contact with people of the same sex**, the percentage who **seriously considered suicide significantly increased**.
-  The percentage of **LGB students who had an HIV test significantly decreased**.

These trends show the critical need to put supports in place that specifically address the needs of LGB youth.





HOW CAN YOU USE THE DATA FROM THIS REPORT?

Data from this report can be used to

- ✓ **Guide conversations with key stakeholders (e.g., public health organizations, education organizations, community groups, parent groups) and other partners who are focused on improving adolescent health behaviors.**
- ✓ **Identify and address adolescent health disparities related to race/ethnicity and sexual orientation.**
- ✓ **Inform the development of evidence-based policies to address HIV, STDs, unintended pregnancy, violence, and mental health among youth.**
- ✓ **Justify funding for school-based or community programs that protect and support student health and provide needed services.**
- ✓ **Promote awareness and bring the community together to address gaps in the health needs of adolescents.**
- ✓ **Monitor progress toward achieving the *Healthy People* national health objectives and other program indicators.**



WHAT ACTIONS COULD IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF OUR NATION'S STUDENTS?

Behaviors established during adolescence often continue into adulthood, and young people's experiences during this critical time have long-lasting impacts on their future health and well-being.

CDC has established an evidence-based approach to school-based HIV and STD

prevention, which also impacts substance use and experiencing violence. It includes providing quality sexual health education, connecting students to sexual health services, and establishing safe and supportive school environments. These evidence-based strategies benefit all students. Further, activities related to health education and health services can be tailored to address health outcomes other than sexual behaviors, including high-risk substance use, violence, and mental health. Promoting safe and supportive environments, which includes increasing school connectedness and engaging parents, can impact all of these health outcomes.

Connectedness to family, peers, and important adults in schools and community organizations is key to protecting adolescent health. Students are more likely to thrive if they know they matter and that they have adults, teachers, and friends who care about their safety and success. These protections can last long into adulthood, leading to better mental health, less substance use, fewer experiences of violence, and a lower likelihood of STDs.

Families can provide an essential source of connectedness and support by staying engaged with what is going on in their adolescents' daily lives and talking to them about their family values. Schools can build environments that provide safety and a sense of connection for students, deliver evidence-based health education that provides skill-building information for healthy decision-making, and connect students to necessary health services.

Schools, families, and communities can work together to provide more intentional messages, skills, and mental health support for adolescents so that encouraging trends can continue and troubling trends can be reversed.

CDC and partners are taking action on multiple levels, including funding, implementing, and evaluating programs that address many health risks and protective factors that impact adolescents.