

2023 Wilmington Public Schools Youth Risk Health Survey (YRBS) Fact Sheet

What is the YRBS?

In 1990, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to monitor health behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) developed a version of the YRBS, the Youth Health Survey (YHS), to further focus on health behaviors of Commonwealth youth. Wilmington Public School's survey is an adaptation of both the YRBS and YHS.

Survey questions are added, removed, or updated in reaction to emerging health trends. Responses are collected every two years from high school and middle school students. The surveys are all part of a larger effort to help communities increase the resiliency of young people by reducing high-risk behaviors and promoting healthy behaviors.

Who is eligible for the YRBS?

All students in grades 6 through 12 are eligible to participate. Parents can opt their child out of taking the survey and students can choose not to participate.

Is the YRBS anonymous?

Student participation is both anonymous and voluntary. The surveys are completed using a generic web link and no identifying information is collected.

How is YRBS data disseminated?

A report is created for the school district. Average results for the school will be made public in the fall of 2023 and will be used to improve the health and overall well-being of children and youth in Wilmington, Middlesex County, and across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

How are YRBS data used?

The YRBS is considered the primary source for comprehensive data on school-aged youth and young adult health practices and health risk behaviors. School districts, local communities, state governments, and public health organizations use YRBS data to set and track progress toward meeting school health and health promotion program goals, support modification of school health curricula or other programs, support new legislation and policies that promote health, and seek funding and other support for new initiatives.

CDC and other federal agencies routinely use YRBS data to assess trends in priority health behaviors among high school students, monitor progress toward achieving national health objectives, and evaluate the contribution of broad prevention efforts in schools and other settings toward helping the nation reduce health risk behaviors among youth.

Will this survey cause students to initiate or increase high-risk behaviors?

There is no evidence that simply asking students about health behaviors will encourage them to try that behavior. The causes and determinants of health risk behaviors are very complex. Students receive regular exposure to information about tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; violence; and sexuality through their school curricula, the media, parents, friends, and community organizations. Exposure to a

small number of questions on any one topic is not likely to cause a significant change in behavior—either good or bad.

Do students answer the questions truthfully?

Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. JSI follows the MA Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data cleaning methods when processing YRBS data to help identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know that procedures have been developed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation.

Who is JSI?

JSI has been subcontracted by the Middlesex League since 2017 to facilitate the administration of the YRBS, analyze the results, and create reports. JSI is a health care research and consulting organization committed to improving the health of individuals and communities worldwide. Its fundamental goal is to ensure that all individuals can live their best and healthiest life, regardless of age or circumstances. In pursuit of our goal, JSI provides innovative management consulting and technical assistance incorporating a broad range of skills. Founded in 1978, they collaborate with government agencies, the private sector, and local nonprofit and civil society organizations to identify and implement solutions to public health challenges. These partnerships improve the quality, accessibility, and equity of health systems and lead to better health outcomes.