

Virginia Youth Survey

Purpose

The Virginia Youth Survey is part of a statewide surveillance system that monitors health risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and adults. The survey is conducted every other year during the fall in randomly selected high schools and middle schools.

The Virginia Youth Survey measures behaviors in the following areas:

- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence
- Alcohol and other drug use
- Tobacco use
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors
- Inadequate physical activity

Data Usage

The data is used to monitor trends in health risk and health promoting behaviors. This data allows community organizations, local health districts, and school divisions to provide youth the support and services that target the most prevalent health risk behaviors. Additionally, this data is used to secure funding for statewide programs that promote healthy youth behaviors.

Commonly Asked Questions

Who supports this survey?

The survey is supported by major national organizations interested in the health of youth including: The American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

How was my child picked to be in the survey?

Approximately 10,000 students in grades 6-12 will be randomly selected to participate. A class your child is in was selected randomly to participate. All students in that class are being asked to participate.

Is parental consent required for my child to take the survey? Yes, selected schools are required to send a consent form to parents at least 30 days before survey administration date.



Results from the 2015 Virginia Youth Survey show that VA high schoolers are improving their health behaviors.



Injury and Violence



Cigarette Use



Drug Use

For the first time, these trends are statistically significant



Over 350,000 High School Students in Virginia



These trends are statistically significant because they have been identified multiple years in-a-row. This shows the behaviors are due to something more than random chance.

How long does it take to fill out the survey?

One class period is needed (approximately 45 minutes). The high school survey contains 93 questions and the middle school survey contains 67 questions.

Can I see the questions my student will be asked? Yes, a copy of the survey is available online at vdh.virginia.gov/virginia-youth-survey/ and by contacting the Virginia Department of Health at 804-864-7649.

Is student participation anonymous?

How is student privacy protected?

Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy through anonymous and voluntary participation. No names or other types of personally identifying information are ever requested.

Students complete the self-administered questionnaire by recording their responses directly on an answer sheet containing no personal identifiers. To the extent possible, students' desks are spread throughout the classroom to minimize the chance that students will see each other's responses. Neither survey administrators nor classroom teachers wander around the classroom while students are taking the survey. Students also are encouraged to use an extra sheet of paper to cover their responses. Published reports do not include names of counties, cities, school divisions, schools or students.

Does the survey include a physical exam?

The survey does not include a physical test or exam.

Do students answer questions truthfully?

Yes. Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. Internal reliability checks help to identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know procedures have been developed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation.

Is an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review required to administer the survey?

When the YRBS was first launched in the early 1990's the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control Institutional Review Board (CDC IRB) determined that the individual state survey methodology was not research, but instead was public health practice (surveillance) providing information for program planning and implementation and identifying trends in risk behavior. Since the CDC IRB does not consider the survey as research, the Federal Regulations (45 CRF 46) do not apply.

The VYS team does, however, submit an application for review annually to the VDH IRB. VDH IRB approval can be viewed at the VYS website [here](#).

Does VDH sell VYS data?

No. The VDH does NOT sell data of any kind, including that of VYS.

Are VYS reports and data available for viewing?

once approved by CDC for public distribution, de-identified, aggregated data and reports are available and uploaded to the VDH website at no charge to the public. Parents may download the questionnaires and survey results at no charge from the [VDH VYS website](#).

Are students tracked over time to see how their behavior changes?

No. Each time the survey is done, a new sample of schools and students will be drawn. Students who participated cannot be tracked because no identifying information is collected.

Is exposure to questions related to subsequent behavior?

A common concern is whether youth exposed to survey questions about health related behaviors, such as drug use, show increases in these behaviors. Researchers have not found any evidence that questionnaire completion affects behavior.

Is my child required to participate in the survey?

No. The survey is voluntary; however, we would like all selected students to take part in it. No action will be taken against the school, you or your child if your child does not take part. Students may choose at any time to opt out of the survey.

What is passive versus active consent?

Passive parental permission means the parent is given an opportunity to opt the student out of the survey. A student is excluded from the survey when their parent returns a signed form denying permission. If a form is not returned, parental permission to participate in the survey is assumed. Active parental permission means the parent must opt the student into the survey. A signature is needed from a parent authorizing the student's participation. A student is not allowed to take part in the YRBS. There are no federal laws or regulations that require the use of active parental permission for the YRBS.

What if my child receives a survey but I have not signed a consent form?

If a situation occurs where a school administers the survey in absence of parental consent forms the school's data will not be included in the analysis.

Are sexual health questions asked for all grade levels?

No. Sexual Health related questions are not asked on the middle school survey. A copy of the middle school survey can be found [here](#).

The Virginia Youth Survey is sponsored by the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth with support from Virginia Department of Education, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For additional information, please contact:
Telephone: 804-864-7649
Email: VYSrequest@vdh.virginia.gov
Web: vdh.virginia.gov/virginia-youth-survey/