



RATIONALE and DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY CONTENT

Healthy Youth Survey 2025

This document describes the content, development, and design of the survey. It then provides the importance of and rationale for including each of the survey questions by topic area.

Survey Content Overview

The Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) contains questions related to several topics, including:

- Student demographic information (e.g., age, grade level, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, financial and housing stability, and gender)
- Unintentional injury behaviors (e.g., helmet use, seatbelt use, cell phone use while driving)
- Safety and intentional injury behavior (e.g. bullying, fighting, weapon carrying)
- Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use
- Access to school-based services
- Physical activity and eating
- Disordered eating and weight stigma
- Health status and healthcare
- Mental health and quality of life (e.g. depression, suicide, self-harm, problematic internet use, distress due to changes in the environment)
- School climate (e.g. bullying, perception of safety)
- Physical activity and food access (e.g., fruit and vegetable consumption)
- Related risk and protective factors (including community, school, and peer-individual factors)
- Sexual behavior and sexual violence (schools can submit an exemption request for questions on these topics – more information later in document)

Note that Students in grade 6 (and grade 7 in small school districts) will receive a shorter and simplified version of the survey that does not include all topics in the survey given to older students (grade 8-12). More information about these differences is included below.

Survey Development

Prior to every administration of the HYS, survey questions are reviewed and modified to fit state and local needs. Staff from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Department of Health (DOH), the Health Care Authority's Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR), and the Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) have collaborated on the content of the survey. Representatives from Washington Tribes and Tribal public health, local health jurisdictions, schools, Educational Service Districts (ESDs), community mobilization, the prevention/intervention field, and universities were also invited to be involved in shaping the content of the survey. The public also had the opportunity to submit proposals for changes and additions to the survey via the general comments on www.AskHYS.net.

Removable Survey Questions

Survey questionnaires include questions on sexual behavior and sexual violence for schools with Grades 8, 10 and 12 (and Grades 9 and 11 in small school districts) on the main survey form. These questions have been on the survey for several years. If including sexual behavior, sexual violence, or both sets of questions on the survey causes undue hardship for a school or district, creates a risk to students' safety, or potential loss of funding, a School District Superintendent (or authorized representative) can request an exemption for each of these topics, and not include them on the survey. More information on these questions is available below in the section titled *Sexual Behavior and Sexual Violence Questions*.

Survey Question Sources

Survey questions are generally chosen from previous Washington survey instruments or adapted from national established and tested surveys. New questions added to the HYS are field tested with students.

Survey questions primarily come from:

- Communities that Care Survey
- Monitoring the Future
- Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System
- Regional partners

Survey Questions and Rationale

Sample survey questions and their rationale are presented by category below.

Demographic Questions

Gathering basic demographic information helps to verify that the students participating in the survey are representative of the statewide student population in these grades. In addition, basic background information allows for examination of trends and differences among students of

varying background characteristics.

Sample questions:

- How old are you? (6th grade only)
- What sex were you assigned at birth? (Female/Male)
- How do you describe yourself? Choose all that apply. (American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian or Asian American; Black or African-American; Of Hispanic/Latino or of Spanish origin; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; White)

Unintentional Injury Questions

Unintentional injury is a leading cause of death for Washington residents aged 1 to 44. Some of the behaviors of interest in the HYS include cell phone use while driving, seat belt use, and drinking/marijuana use and driving.

State and local health jurisdictions run programs to increase awareness around the dangers of drunk, drugged, and distracted driving. These programs strive to prevent injuries and death from motor vehicle accidents.

Sample question:

- During the past 30 days, how many times did you ride in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol? (8-12th grade only)

Safety and Intentional Injury Questions

Reducing violent behaviors such as bullying, harassment, physical abuse, and dating violence are important goals of state and local programs. Intentional injury behaviors of interest also include fighting, weapon carrying, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Each of these experiences of intentional injury or violence are associated with threats to both current and future personal safety, injury, and death. The HYS includes questions designed to determine student safety and the extent to which students engage in or are exposed to selected intentional injury behaviors.

Sample questions:

- "Bullying" is when one or more students threaten, spread rumors about, hit, shove, or otherwise hurt another student over and over again. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight or tease each other in a friendly way. In the last 30 days, how often have you been bullied?
- During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight?
- During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon on school property (such as a gun, knife, or other weapon)?

Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health is a priority at the local and national levels, with suicide a leading cause of death among adolescents and a teen “Mental Health Crisis” announced by the federal government in 2022. The HYS has always asked youth about their mental health, from depressive feelings to thoughts of suicide, as a way to understand and support them within schools, communities, and with policy. The survey also includes measures of positive mental health, like hope for the future and having people to turn to when you need support.

Sample questions:

- During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?
- When you feel sad or hopeless, are there adults that you can turn to for help?
- During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide? (8th-12th grade only)
- Have you ever tried to kill yourself? (6th grade only)

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use

One of the behaviors of interest in the HYS is the extent to which students have used—and are using—alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs. Asking these questions again maintains seamless local and statewide assessments of changes in patterns of substance use over time for Washington’s students. Further, these questions provide important data-driven direction for prevention both locally and across the state.

The HYS measures cigarette smoking, vaping, alcohol, and marijuana use. Tobacco use is considered an important preventable cause of death in the United States, and many smokers begin smoking in adolescence. Both alcohol and substance use (especially heavy use) are associated with other behaviors in youth such as school failure and delinquency.

Sample questions:

- During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have an alcoholic drink? A drink is a glass of wine, a bottle or can of beer, a shot glass of liquor, a mixed drink, etc.
- During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?

Access to School-Based Services

Schools are increasingly perceived as a main way for students to access services. When schools do provide these services, students are more likely to know they are available. Therefore, the HYS includes questions related to access to services.

Sample questions:

- In the last year, did you have any contact with a school support personnel (such as a school counselor, nurse, social worker, Student Assistance Professional (SAP), intervention specialist, mental health counselor, therapist)? (8-12th grade only)
- How do you hear about leadership opportunities for you to take part in at school or in your community? (8-12th grade only)

Disordered Eating and Weight Stigma

Eating disorders are the second most fatal mental health condition for adolescents. However, they frequently go undiagnosed and early signs are not commonly recognized. To better understand the widespread and dangerous patterns of disordered eating among Washington youth, and to assess the role of body and food shaming from friends and family, the HYS team worked with Washington State and national experts to adapt a question set on these topics in 2023. The first year of data showed that around half of students participate in some form of disordered eating behavior and more than half experience body and food shaming. These questions are being asked again to begin to establish a baseline trend to help communities understand what we can do to support young people in the face of this epidemic.

Sample question and response options (question is asked on survey for 8-12th grade only):

- During the past year, did you:
 - Intentionally go without eating for 12 hours or more (also called fasting) to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight?
 - Vomit, use laxatives, or eat certain foods or liquids intentionally (such as foods that cause stomach pain or nausea) to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight?
 - Eat so much food in a short period of time that you would be embarrassed if others saw you?

Physical Activity and Food Access Questions

Exercise and physical activity can influence mental and physical health, while access to diverse foods to support nutrition is also essential for health and wellbeing. Not having access to spaces for physical activity and play or to enough food each day can have both short-term and long-term impacts on physical and mental health.

Sample questions:

- In the past 7 days, on how many days were you physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day? (Add up all the time you spent in any kind of physical activity that increases your heart rate or makes you breathe hard some of the time)
- How often in the past 12 months did you or your family have to cut meal size or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (8-12th grade only)

Health Status and Health Care

The Healthy People 2020's overarching goals are to attain high-quality longer lives, achieve health equity, and promote good health for all across life stages. The HYS includes questions to assess behaviors that can impact people's quality of life and identify health disparities. Healthy People 2030 objectives emphasize the importance of health education and access to health care services for preventing disease and minimizing the long-term effects of disease.¹ The HYS includes questions on asthma, disability, toothache, and other health outcomes. Questions are also asked about access to health care and health-related education in schools.

Sample question:

- Has a doctor or nurse ever told you that you have asthma?
- When was the last time you saw a doctor or health care provider for a check-up or physical exam when you were not sick or injured? (8-12th grade only)
- Last year in school, were you taught about consent and healthy relationships? (8-12th grade only)

Risk and Protective Factors

Risk factors are characteristics of individuals and their families, schools, and communities that make them more vulnerable to ill health. Similarly, protective factors exert a positive influence or buffer against the negative influence of risk in these social environments.

Most of the risk and protective factors measured in the survey are associated with behaviors such as substance use, violence, and staying in school. The presence of multiple risk factors predicts an increased likelihood that an individual will engage in these behaviors, whereas the presence of protective factors helps to buffer the effect of risk factors and increase resilience.

These questions relate to the students themselves, their peers, their families, their schools, and the communities in which they live. Past survey responses have highlighted important patterns that guide school prevention and intervention programs across the state.

Community Risk Factors

These risk factors include laws and norms favorable towards drug use, perceived availability of drugs, and perceived availability of handguns.

- If you wanted to get a handgun, how easy would it be for you to get one? (8-12th grade only)

Community Protective Factors

These protective factors include opportunities for prosocial involvement and rewards for prosocial involvement.

¹ <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives>
HYS 2025

- There are adults in my neighborhood or community I could talk to about something important (8-12th grade only)

School Risk Factors

These factors include academic failure and low commitment to school.

- Think back over the past year in school. How often did you enjoy school?

School Protective Factors

These factors include opportunities for prosocial involvement and rewards for prosocial involvement.

- I feel safe during school.

Peer-Individual Risk Factors

These factors include early initiation of drug use, favorable attitudes toward drug use, perceived risk of drug use, and friends' use of drugs.

- How much do you think people risk harming themselves if they: Smoke one or more packs of cigarettes per day?

Family Risk Factors

These factors address family management.

- My parent or caregiver asks if I've gotten my homework done. (8-12th grade only)

Family Protective Factors

These factors include opportunities for prosocial involvement and rewards for prosocial involvement.

- If you skipped school, would you be caught by your parent(s)/caregiver(s)? (8-12th grade only)

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Sexual orientation and gender identity questions can provide useful information to address health disparities among youth and to inform local services and programs. The two questions are asked with other demographic information on surveys for grades 8-12.

Sexual Orientation Question:

- Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. Please choose all that apply to you. (Heterosexual/Straight; Gay or lesbian; Bisexual; Two Spirit or Indigiqueer; Questioning/Not sure of my sexual orientation; Something else fits better; I do not know what this question is asking.)

Gender identity question:

- Below is a list of terms that people may use to describe their gender identity. Please choose all that apply to you. (Boy/Man; Girl/Woman, Transgender boy/man; Transgender girl/woman; Two Spirit or Indigiqueer; Questioning/not sure of my gender identity ;Something else fits better; I do not know what this

question is asking.)

A simplified gender identity question is available for surveys administered to 6th and 7th graders. Unless schools specifically opt into asking this question, 6th and 7th graders are not asked this question. The optional question is "What is your gender?" with the following response options: boy; girl; something else fits better.

Sexual Behavior and Sexual Violence

Sexual behavior and sexual violence questions are only included on HYS administered to youth in grades 8-12. Schools can request an exemption for either or both topics.

Sexual behavior questions can provide useful information for how and where to direct appropriate interventions for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections with limited resources. This information can also help reshape social norms by giving students who have not had sex an opportunity to be represented and providing all students with an accurate representation of the fact that not all teenagers are sexually active. Premature sexual behavior is associated with a variety of other health risk behaviors so the information can be used to generate support for other school and community-based services and programs, not just sexual health education. Meanwhile, questions on sexual violence help communities understand the scope of the problem and which groups of youth may be most in need of support and directed programming.

Sexual behavior questions:

- Have you ever had sex (Yes; No; Not sure)*
- How old were you when you had sex for the first time? (I have never had sex; 11 years or younger; 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 years old or older).
- During your life, with whom have you had sexual contact? Select all that apply. (I have not had sexual contact; Females; Males; People not included in this list)
- With how many people have you had sex? (I have never had sex; 1 person; 2 people, 3 people, 4 people, 5 people; 6 or more people)
- The last time you had sex, what method(s) did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections? (Select all that you used): (I have never had sex; No method was used; Birth control pills; Condoms; Dental dams; An IUD or implant (such as Mirena or ParaGard; Implanon or Nexplanon); A shot (such as *Depo-Provera*); Patch or birth control ring (such as *Xulane*; *NuvaRing*); Withdrawal; Some other method; Not sure).

Sexual violence questions:

- Have you ever been in a situation where someone made you engage in kissing, sexual touch or having sex when you did not want to? (No, Yes)
- Have you ever seen someone about your age pressure someone else to kiss, touch, or have sex when they did not want to? (No; Yes)

Validity and Honesty

Several questions and patterns are used to help determine how honestly youth answer the survey and if their surveys should be considered valid.

Sample question:

- How honest were you in filling out this survey? (I was very honest; I was honest most of the time; I was honest some of the time; I was honest once in a while; I was not honest at all).