

Public Health

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Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe and Healthy Communities

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Departments of Health and Education Announce Improvement in Health Risk Behaviors Among Public High School Students

Providence, Rhode Island, April 11, 2006 – Today, the Rhode Island Departments of Health (HEALTH) and Education (RIDE) announced the results of the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). YRBS monitors health risk behaviors among public high school students.

The YRBS is an epidemiologic surveillance system that was established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor the prevalence of youth behaviors that most influence health. The YRBS is conducted every two years and is a national school-based survey. In Rhode Island there were 2,362 students that were surveyed in public high schools grades 9-12.

“YRBS gives a picture of where we are, where we have been, and where we need to go regarding health risk behaviors among public high school students. The 2005 YRBS shows significant improvements in some areas, but there is still much work that needs to be done to improve the health of our children,” said David R. Gifford, MD, MPH, Director of HEALTH.

The 2005 YRBS Summary Report shows significant trends for 18 of 36 key health risk behaviors. Thirteen of the eighteen trends showed improvement in key health behaviors, while five of the eighteen trends showed a decline in key health behaviors. The remaining 18 risk behaviors remained relatively stable over time.

Health risk behaviors that showed improvement include: seat belt use, physical fighting and weapon carrying in school, drinking and driving, condom use, activity level in physical education classes, inhalant use, alcohol use, marijuana use (ever), ecstasy use, illegal drugs at school, smoking cigarettes, and smoking at school.

“I am pleased to note the positive trends regarding use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs and regarding school safety,” said Peter McWalters, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Through our health-education and physical-education classes, through after-school programs, and through thoughtful health policies in the schools, we will continue to promote healthy behavior and good decisions about health and safety for all young people in Rhode Island.”

Areas that still need improvement include: the number of overweight youth, the number of young people who think of themselves as being overweight, increasing moderate physical activity, increasing milk consumption, and increasing HIV/AIDS education in schools.

“An integrated, evidence-based approach is required to address these complex risk behaviors. HEALTH and RIDE must continue to work together with schools, families, youth, and the community to help our youth make healthy lifestyle choices. By working together, we are able to create safe and healthy environments in which our youth can thrive,” said Dr. Gifford.

For more information on the YRBS or to view the 2005 YRBS Summary Report go to <http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/statistics/yrbs.php> or call the Department of Health at 401-222-7628.

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