

Trends in the West Virginia Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017

West Virginia middle school students' risk-taking behaviors



Patricia Cahape Hammer, June 2018
West Virginia Department of Education
Office of Data Management and Information Systems

The results of the 2017 West Virginia Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), conducted in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have many stories to tell about our middle school students' life experiences. The survey monitors five types of health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and adults. We look here at three of those categories related to student risk-taking: injury and violence, tobacco use, and alcohol and other drug use. Wellness behaviors, especially weight management/dietary behaviors and physical activity, are reported separately.¹ The survey results presented here reveal how risk behaviors have changed over time and how they are reflected in the lives of students at various academic achievement levels.

The 2017 YRBS middle school survey was completed by 2,089 students in randomly selected classrooms within 49 randomly selected public middle schools in West Virginia during the spring of 2017. The school response rate was 98% and the student response rate was 78%. Students completed an anonymous, 47-item questionnaire. Survey procedures protected the privacy of students by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation.

For detailed reports based on this survey produced by the CDC and the West Virginia Department of Education, visit wvde.us/data-management-information-systems/data-analysis-research-and-program-evaluation/ and click on the "CDC youth risk behavior surveillance" menu button.

Risk behaviors over time

The West Virginia Department of Education has been conducting the middle school version of the YRBS since 2001, which gives us a long view of risk-taking behaviors. Some of the survey items, however, have been added in more recent years (in all cases, the years are noted). Here are some of the notable trends.

Injury and violence

Only one injury-related behavior worsened during the past 16 years, in terms of a rise in the percentage of W.Va. middle school students reporting it.

Rarely or never wore a helmet when rollerblading or skateboarding	73% (2001)	80% (2017)
---	------------	------------

The rate for some behaviors remained much the same:

Ever carried a weapon (such as a gun, knife or club)	41% (2001)	40% (2017)
Were ever bullied on school property	47% (2009)	45% (2017)
Were ever electronically bullied	25% (2011)	27% (2017)
Ever seriously thought about killing themselves	21% (2001)	21% (2017)

¹ See Hammer, P. C. (2018). West Virginia middle school students' wellness behaviors: Trends in the West Virginia middle school Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017. Charleston, WV: West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Data Management and Information Systems. Available at wvde.us/data-management-information-systems/data-analysis-research-and-program-evaluation/.

Other injury- or violence-related behaviors saw a decrease in the percentage of students reporting them over the past 16 years:

Rarely or never wore a seat belt when riding in a car	17% (2001)	5% (2017)
Ever rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol	37% (2001)	15% (2017)
Were ever in a physical fight	58% (2001)	42% (2017)

Tobacco use

There has been **a solid decrease in** the past 16 years in the percentage of W.Va. **middle school students who report using tobacco** – by various measures:

Ever tried cigarette smoking (even one or two puffs)	47% (2001)	15% (2017)
Currently smoked cigarettes (on at least one day in the past 30 days)	16% (2001)	4% (2017)
Frequently smoke cigarettes (on 20 or more days during the 30 days before the survey)	6% (2001)	1% (2017)

Trying or currently using vapor products is also down in the past two years (since the survey included this question):

Ever used an electronic vapor product	25% (2015)	19% (2017)
Currently use an electronic vapor product (on at least one day in the past 30 days)	11% (2015)	6% (2017)

Alcohol and other drug use

Alcohol and drug use decreased among W.Va. middle school students:

Ever drank alcohol (other than a few sips)	46% (2001)	23% (2017)
Ever used marijuana	16% (2001)	8% (2017)
Ever used cocaine (any form)	5% (2001)	2% (2017)
Ever used inhalants	13% (2011)	7% (2017)

Risk behaviors and level of achievement level

In addition to reporting student behaviors over time, the YRBS also reports differences in risk-taking behaviors by students' self-reported level of academic performance. The numbers shown below – from the 2017 survey – indicate the percentage of students *within* (not *across*) each academic achievement level who indicated agreement with the item.

W.Va. middle school **students with lower achievement** not only face greater risk of school failure than their higher achieving peers but also **face greater risk of injuries and violence**, as seen below:

Rarely or never wore a seat belt (when riding in a car)	2% (A's)	6% (B's)	7% (C's)	16% (D's/F's)
Ever rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking	11% (A's)	17% (B's)	22% (C's)	30% (D's/F's)
Ever carried a weapon (such as a gun, knife or club)	34% (A's)	43% (B's)	55% (C's)	64% (D's/F's)
Were ever in a physical fight	30% (A's)	50% (B's)	60% (C's)	77% (D's/F's)
Were ever bullied on school property	41% (A's)	49% (B's)	54% (C's)	51% (D's/F's)
Were ever electronically bullied	24% (A's)	28% (B's)	35% (C's)	39% (D's/F's)
Ever thought seriously about killing themselves	15% (A's)	23% (B's)	31% (C's)	38% (D's/F's)
Ever tried to kill themselves	4% (A's)	12% (B's)	15% (C's)	22% (D's/F's)

As shown in the comparisons below, **greater percentages of lower-achieving students engaged in risky behaviors** – at least one day during the 30 days leading up to the survey – **with regard to tobacco use**.

Cigarettes or cigars	2% (A's)	7% (B's)	10% (C's)	19% (D's/F's)
Electronic vapor product	3% (A's)	6% (B's)	13% (C's)	21% (D's/F's)
Smokeless tobacco	2% (A's)	4% (B's)	8% (C's)	19% (D's/F's)
One or more of the above	5% (A's)	11% (B's)	22% (C's)	37% (D's/F's)

Lower-achieving students were more likely to try – at least once in their lives – **alcohol or other drugs**.

Alcohol	14% (A's)	28% (B's)	39% (C's)	62% (D's/F's)
Marijuana	3% (A's)	9% (B's)	22% (C's)	36% (D's/F's)
Cocaine (any form)	1% (A's)	2% (B's)	5% (C's)	9% (D's/F's)
Inhalants	4% (A's)	7% (B's)	15% (C's)	19% (D's/F's)
Steroids (unprescribed)	<1% (A's)	3% (B's)	3% (C's)	5% (D's/F's)
Pain medicine (unprescribed)	2% (A's)	4% (B's)	5% (C's)	8% (D's/F's)

This publication was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 1U87PS004130 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.