



# **SUMMARY OF THE NEW JERSEY STUDENT HEALTH SURVEY**

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New Jersey Department of Education • Office of Program Support Services  
[PTM 1504.68]

# BACKGROUND

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This brochure summarizes the findings of the 2003 New Jersey Student Health Survey of high school students (NJSHS). The 2003 NJSHS incorporates much of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) which is one component of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in collaboration with representatives from 71 state and local departments of education and health, 19 other federal agencies, and national education and health organizations. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System was designed to focus the nation on behaviors among youth related to the leading causes of preventable premature death and illness among both youth and adults and to assess how these risk behaviors change over time. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System addresses the following health risk behaviors: safety behaviors; violence; use of tobacco; use of alcohol and drugs; sexual behaviors; dietary behaviors; and physical activity.

The survey was administered to 1,399 students in 26 New Jersey public high schools in the spring of 2003. The instrument used for the 2003 New Jersey Student Health Survey drew questions largely from the core YRBS instrument, with the addition of new questions for the study of attitudes about substance use and students' attitudes about school work. It contains 92 multiple-choice items, which can be self-administered for students with at least a 7th grade reading level. Survey procedures protected the privacy of students by allowing only anonymous and voluntary participation and by allowing only external survey administrators

access to completed survey forms. Only students with documented parental permission participated, following local parental permission procedures. Overall, 65% of all sampled students participated (1,399 out of 2,140) and 74% of all sampled schools (26 out of 35), yielding an overall response rate of 49%. Data for this report are weighted only by demographic variables to match the grade, gender and ethnicity of students in the overall New Jersey student population but do not account for the probability of selection in sampling at the school or classroom level. Consequently, findings from the 2003 survey should not be compared to findings in previous years which used more extensive weighting methods.

**Weighted Profile of Students in the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

SEX		GRADE		ETHNICITY		AGE	
Female	49.9%	9th	28.7%	Black/ African American	15.1%	14 years or younger	10.2%
Male	50.1%	10th	25.8%	Hispanic/ Latino	13.8%	15 years	27.2%
		11th	23.5%	White	58.0%	16 years	25.1%
		12th	22.0%	All other races	13.1%	17 years	22.5%
						18 years or older	14.9%

## ATTITUDES ABOUT SCHOOL

More than a third of students often or almost always enjoyed being in school (37%) compared with slightly less than a third who often or almost always hated being in school (31%). Likewise, about a quarter of students either found their school courses to be very or quite interesting (26%) or to be very or slightly dull (27%).

Regarding school truancy, 32% of students reported having skipped or cut at least one whole day of school in the last 4 weeks while 8% have skipped four or more days in the period of the last month. Half of 12th grade students reported skipping at least one day in this period. It should be noted that the survey was conducted in the spring of the school year.

## POTENTIAL FOR INJURY

### *Depression and Suicide*

Almost a third of high school students indicated signs of depression as 28% reported that in the past year, they felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for a period of at least two weeks that they stopped doing some usual activities. Girls (35%) were more likely than boys (22%) to have reported signs of depression.

Almost 1 in 6 high school students indicated they seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months (17%) or planned a suicide attempt (15%). Nine percent of students reported that they actually made a suicide attempt in the past year.

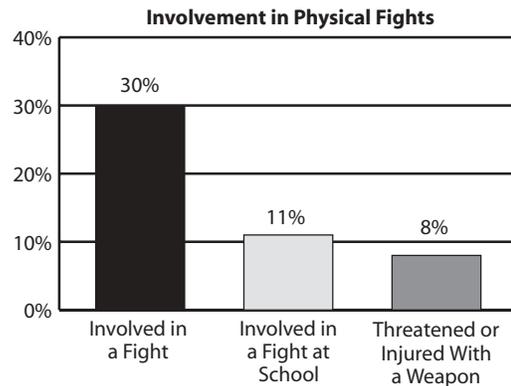
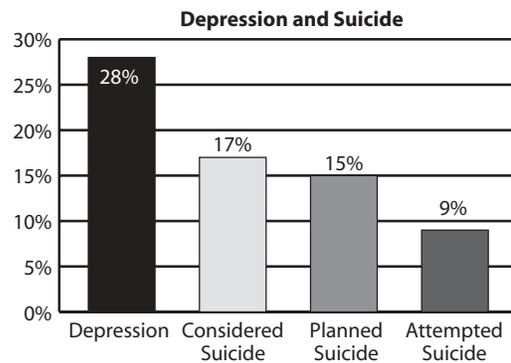
### *Violence*

In the past 30 days, 11% of students reported that they carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club and 5% carried some type of weapon to school. Almost 1 in 20 students (4%) missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt they would be unsafe either at school or on their way to or from school. While boys (8%) were more likely to carry a weapon at school than girls (2%), boys (5%) and girls (4%) were equally likely to have felt unsafe at school on some occasion.

About a third of students reported they have been in a physical fight in the past year (30%) and 4% were involved in a severe fight that required the attention of a doctor or nurse. More than 1 in 10 students indicated they had been in a fight at school (11%) while 8% of students were threatened or injured by someone with a weapon while at school.

### *Drinking and Driving*

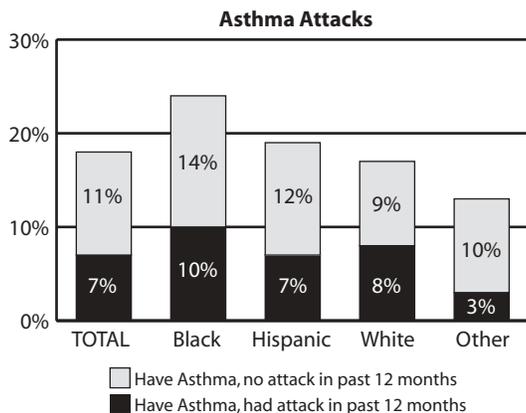
In the last 30 days, 10% of students reported that on at least one occasion they have driven a car or other vehicle after drinking alcohol. During the same period, 24% of students indicated that on at least one occasion, they have been in a car or other vehicle driven by someone else who had been drinking alcohol.



## ASTHMA, DIABETES AND DENTAL CARE

About 1-in-5 students reported that a doctor or nurse has told them that they have asthma (19%). Black/African American students (28%) were most likely to report having this condition. When asked if they had an asthma attack in the past 12 months, 7% of students indicated they have had one attack, while another 11% reported that while they have the condition, they have not had an attack in the past year.

Three percent of students indicated that they have been told they have diabetes. Again, Black/African American students (5%) were the most likely subgroup to report having this condition. About three quarters of students (77%) have had a dental check-up in the past 12 months. About 1-in-10 students have either never been to a dentist for a check-up (2%), don't remember when they last went (5%), or last went to the dentist more than 2 years ago (5%). Black/African American students (23%) and Hispanic students (19%) were most likely to have not been to the dentist recently or not remember their last visit.

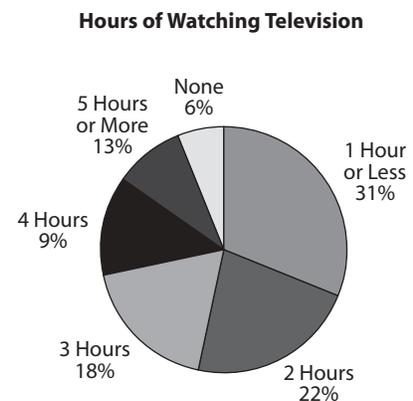


## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

When asked about their physical activity in the past week, about half of high school students reported they spent 2 or fewer days engaging in mild physical activity for at least 30 minutes which did not make them sweat or breathe hard (51%); and 48% spent 2 or fewer days doing exercises to strengthen or tone their muscles. A smaller proportion of students (32%) spent 2 or fewer days engaging in aerobic physical activity for at least 20 minutes that made them sweat and breathe hard. Females were more likely than males to engage in fewer days of tone-up exercises (53% versus 43%), and aerobic exercises (38% versus 27%).

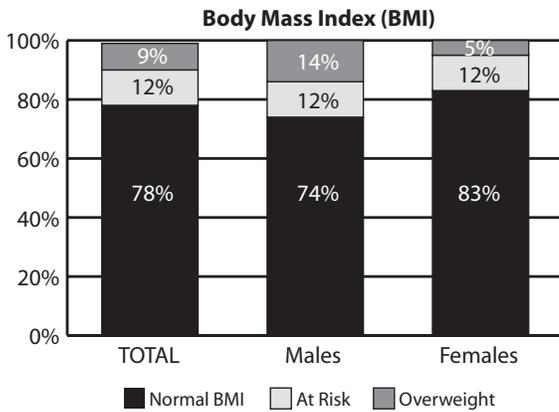
## WATCHING TELEVISION

On an average school day, about 4-in-10 students either watch no television at all (8%) or limit themselves to 1 hour or less of television time (32%). On the other hand, 49% watch between 2 and 4 hours and another 11% watch 5 or more hours of television on an average school day. Black/African American students (30%) and Hispanic students (15%) were more likely than White students (6%) to watch 5 or more hours of television and those 14 and younger (19%) were more likely than other age groups to watch the most hours of TV.



## WEIGHT FOR HEIGHT (BODY MASS INDEX)

Data on student self-reported height and weight was used to calculate a body mass index (BMI) calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. A child's BMI that is greater than the 95th percentile of the index population for gender and age is considered "overweight" while a child in the 85th to 95th percentile is considered "at risk" for being overweight. All others below the 85th percentile are considered "normal". In the New Jersey high school student population, 78% of students were considered normal, 12% were at risk for being overweight and 9% were considered overweight by the BMI calculation. Males (14%) were more likely than females (5%) to be considered overweight.



## DIETARY BEHAVIORS

Students reported their intake of fruits and fruit juices, vegetables and milk during the past 7 days. Concerning fruits and fruit juices, 20% averaged 3 or more servings a day in the past week whereas 37% had less than 1 serving a day.

Concerning intake of green salad, carrots, potatoes and other vegetables, 13% of students reported 3 or more servings a day while 36% averaged less than 1 serving a day in the past week.

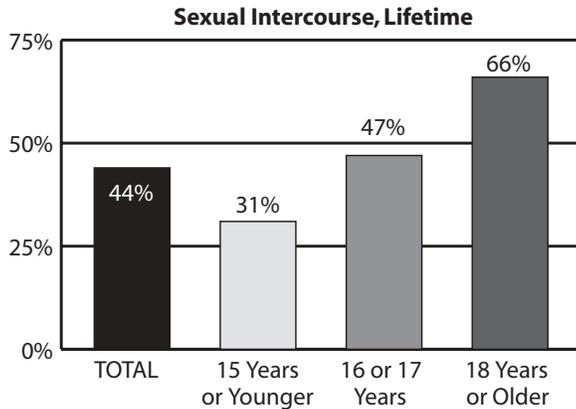
When combining all fruits and vegetables, 57% of students had 2 or fewer servings a day compared to 23% who had 3 or 4 servings a day and 20% who averaged 5 or more servings a day in the past week. These percentages were similar across all ethnic/racial, gender and age groupings.

Regarding the consumption of milk, 39% had one or more servings per day during the past week. However, one in five (21%) had no servings of milk at all during the week.

# SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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Forty-four percent of high school students reported that they had sexual intercourse in their lifetime. Across all grades, males (46%) and females (42%) were equally likely to have had sex; and those 18 and older (66%) were more likely than 16 and 17 year olds (47%) or those 15 and younger (31%) to have engaged in sex in their lifetime. In the last 3 months, 32% of students reported having sex.

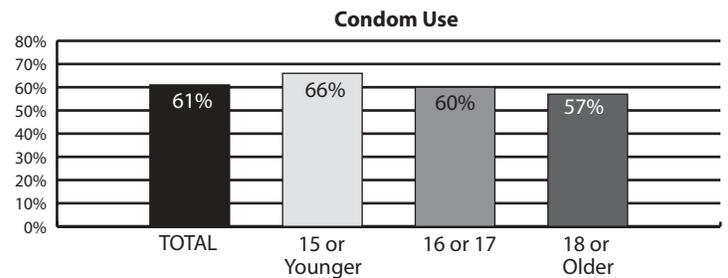


About 1-in-5 students (18%) have had sex with 3 or more partners in their lifetime and 9% have had sex with more than one person in the past three months. Boys (19%) and girls (18%) were equally likely to have had 3 or more partners in their life but boys (11%) were more likely than girls (6%) to have had 2 or more partners in the past 3 months. Older students were also more likely to have had more sexual partners in their lifetime or in the past 3 months. Over a third of those 18 or older (35%) have had 3 or more partners in their life compared to 17% of those 16 to 17 and 13% of those 15 or younger. Similarly, 15% of those 18 and older have had 2 or more partners in the past 3 months compared to 8% of those 16 or 17 to 7% of those 15 or younger.

Among those students who reported having had sex in their lifetime, twenty percent indicated they used drugs or alcohol prior to their last sexual encounter. Boys (25%) were more likely than girls (15%) to have done so, and those 18 and over (26%) were more likely than younger students – 16 and 17 year olds (18%) and 15 and younger (19%) – to indicate their last sexual encounter occurred after drinking alcohol or using drugs. In addition, 10% of all students reported that someone had sexual contact with them against their will with 5% reporting such an occurrence in the past 12 months.

### *Condoms and Contraceptives*

This section focuses on the sexual behaviors of high school students who have had sexual intercourse in the past. Only 6-in-10 students having sex in their life reported that they or their partner used a condom the last time they had sex (61%). Those 15 or younger (66%) were slightly more likely than those 16 or 17 (60%) or those 18 and over (57%) to have used a condom during sex. Hispanic students (54%) were less likely than other racial and ethnic groups to have used condoms.



Sexually active high school students (those who reported having sex within the past 3 months) were asked to identify the method they or their partner used to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sexual intercourse. When given a choice of which contraceptive was used in their last sexual encounter, 54% of students indicated a condom was used and 15% used a birth control pill. However, a quarter of students used either no birth control method (16%) or depended on withdrawal (9%) to prevent pregnancy. About 5% used some other method (3%) or did not recall (2%) what was used when last having sex.

### *HIV/AIDS Education and HIV/STD Testing*

More than 9-in-10 high school students have been taught about AIDS or HIV infection in school (97%), whereas only 3% of students reported either their parents did not want them to participate in these classes or they never received any instruction about HIV/AIDS in school. Black/African American students (7%) were more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to have reported that they were never instructed on HIV/AIDS.

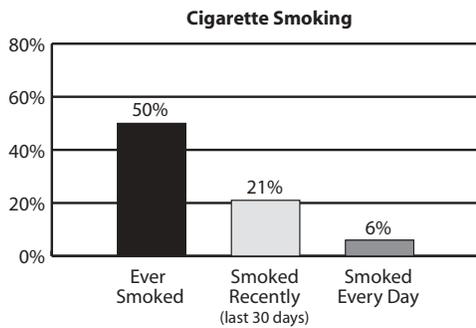
Approximately 1-in-10 students have been tested for HIV, some sexually transmitted disease or both (11%). Overall, 7 percent have been tested for both, 2 percent for HIV only and 2 percent for STDs only. Black/African American students (18%) and those 18 years of age and older (17%) were the most likely groups to have been tested.

### *Pregnancy*

Five percent of students have been, or have gotten someone, pregnant in their lifetime at least once.

## TOBACCO USE

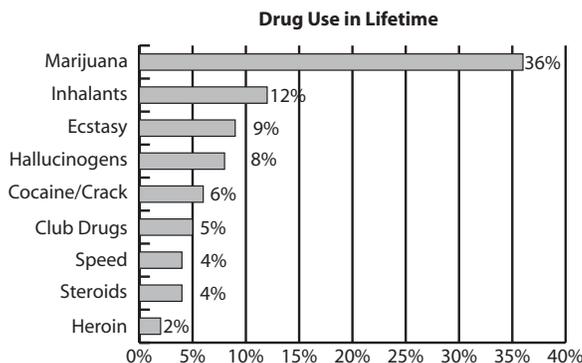
Half of New Jersey high school students (50%) indicated they had tried cigarettes. About 2-in-10 (21%) of all New Jersey high school students smoked at least part of one cigarette on one or more days in the past month. In the past 30 days, the number of students who reported they smoked every day was 6%. Girls (22%) and boys (20%) were equally likely to have smoked in the past 30 days. Of students who smoke, 9% reported smoking at least half a pack of cigarettes a day while 41% smoke only 1 cigarette or less per day.



## DRUGS

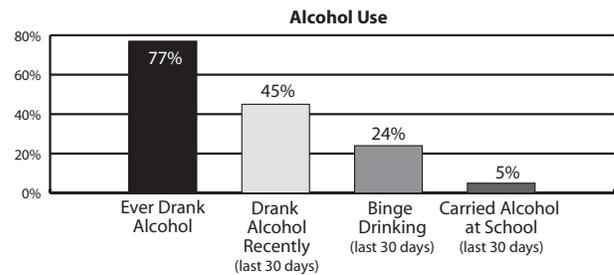
Regarding lifetime usage of illicit substances, more than a third of New Jersey high school students (36%) reported the use of marijuana. Among other substances asked about in the survey: 12% of students reported the use of inhalants (defined as sniffing glue, breathing contents of aerosol spray cans or inhaling any paints or sprays for the purpose of getting high); 9% used ecstasy; 8% used hallucinogens; 6% used crack/cocaine; 5% used some club drug other than ecstasy; 4% used speed; 3% used steroids without a prescription from a doctor; and 2% used heroin. Two percent of students also reported using needles to inject drugs. These findings are all similar to those of prior surveys.

Regarding more recent drug use, 19% of students used marijuana in the past 30 days and 5% used marijuana on school property in that time. Also, 3% of students used inhalants and 3% used cocaine in the past month. In the past year, 3-in-10 students reported being offered drugs at school (30%).



## ALCOHOL

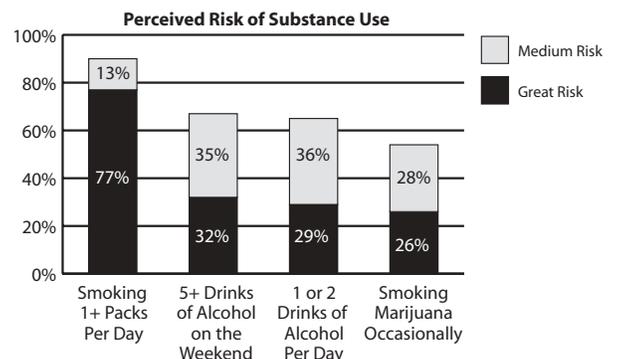
In 2003, 77% of New Jersey high school students used alcohol sometime in their lives and 45% consumed alcohol in the past month. The percentage of students who engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days—having 5 or more drinks on the same occasion—was 24%. Six percent of students indicated they carried or stored alcohol on school property. Boys (46%) and girls (44%) were equally likely to have had alcohol in the past 30 days and to have engaged in binge drinking in that period (boys, 26%; girls, 23%).



## PERCEIVED RISK FROM ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND DRUGS

In general, students were more likely to believe that smoking a pack of cigarettes a day was a great health risk (77%) compared with drinking one or two drinks of alcohol almost every day (29%), having five or more drinks of alcohol once or twice each weekend (32%) or smoking marijuana on occasion (26%). However, a majority of students believe all of these activities are either a great or medium health risk to people who engage in them. Despite the perception of health risk, almost half of students indicated they do not disapprove of people having one or two drinks a day (46%), having five or more drinks a day on the weekend (44%), or occasionally smoking marijuana (43%).

If marijuana were legalized, a majority of students indicated they would still not use it (58%). However, 14% of students reported they would try marijuana for the first time if it were legalized while 12% would increase their use of the drug. Sixteen percent of students would either use the same or less than they currently do.





Reports on the survey can be downloaded at  
[www.nj.gov/njded/students/yrbs/index.html](http://www.nj.gov/njded/students/yrbs/index.html)

More information about the CDC survey  
and tools for comparing results from various locations can be found at  
[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs)

Special requests for data should be directed to  
**New Jersey Department of Education**  
**Office of Program Support Services**  
**PO Box 500**  
**Trenton, NJ 08625-0500**  
**(609) 292-5935**

*The Eagleton Institute's Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University coordinated data collection activities and produced a technical report, detailed report of findings and this summary brochure for the study.*

*Results of the New Jersey Student Health Survey and past Youth Risk Behavior Survey are made available to schools, communities, and other state agencies through printed and web-based reports.*