

About Oregon Healthy Teens

Oregon Healthy Teens (OHT) is Oregon's effort to monitor the health and well-being of adolescents. In 2001, the Oregon Department of Human Services, the Department of Education, and other state agencies collaborated with the Oregon Research Institute to produce a single student survey (the OHT), as part of a 3-year National Cancer Institute grant. The OHT combines the topic areas of the previous two surveys conducted by DHS—the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (conducted by the former Health Division) and the Student Use Survey (conducted by the former Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention). An anonymous and voluntary research-based survey, the OHT was conducted among approximately one third of all 8th and 11th graders statewide, as well as among a smaller sample of youth in grades 9-12, in order to compare against national YRBS data. In 2001, the random sample included over 11,000 8th graders and 7,500 11th graders from 79 High schools and 102 feeder middle schools in 33 counties. The 9-12th grade sample included over 7,700 students from 29 High schools in 15 counties.

How does the survey make a difference in youth health and well-being?

OHT is fundamental to ensuring that young people arrive at adulthood with the skills, interests, assets, and health habits needed to live healthy, happy, and productive lives in caring relationships with other people. It enables schools and communities to know what proportion of their young people are developing successfully and what proportion is having problems. It allows them to assess whether the things they are doing are improving outcomes for young people.

Preventing harmful, unhealthy, and costly behavior patterns is a basic minimum for ensuring youth well-being. Although it does not ensure that young people will reach their full potential, it is essential for giving them the opportunity to do so. Research over the past half century has identified problems that are harmful to youth well-being. They include cigarette smoking, binge drinking, illicit drug use, antisocial behavior, sexual behavior that risks pregnancy or disease, drunk driving, depression, antisocial behavior, academic failure, dropping out of school, improper diet, and lack of exercise. A recent estimate indicated that, in 1998, substance use, anti-social behavior, high-risk sex, high school dropout, and suicide produced costs to the U.S. of \$422 billion. Based on Oregon's proportion of the total U. S. population, an estimate of the cost to Oregon for these problems in a single year would be \$5 billion.

Over the past 20 years, research has identified an increasing number of effective approaches to preventing these problems. These include programs and policies that support families, school practices, media interventions, and neighborhood and community-wide efforts. Accurate estimates of the extent of youth problems are essential for knowing which schools and communities need which programs and whether the programs, when implemented, are working.

Oregon Healthy Teens monitors the factors that influence successful development. Research has identified numerous risk factors and assets that affect young people. They include family, school, neighborhood, and community characteristics. By measuring these influences, OHT provides information to help schools and communities focus on the things that are most important to ensure successful youth development.

Monitoring youth well-being and the factors that influence it is much like the system for monitoring our economy. By accurately measuring economy activity, we have been able to refine economic policy to help reduce the frequency and depth of recessions. As we develop a system for monitoring youth well-being, we will become better and better able to ensure that the largest possible proportion of young people achieve its full potential.

How are the rights of families protected?

In the weeks prior to the survey, parents/guardians receive a letter asking permission for their student to fill out the questionnaire. The parent or guardian is given the option to refuse consent. In addition, each student has the option to decline the survey, or to skip any question they don't want to answer.

How is the confidentiality of the student protected?

The OHT survey is **anonymous**; students are not asked for their names. Once the surveys have been completed and collected, there is **no identifying information** linking a questionnaire to an individual student or parent. In addition, the information reported to the school district is aggregated—it is grouped by grade level and gender, and no individual set of information is identified in these reports.

What topics are included in the survey?

- Tobacco, alcohol and other drug use
- Access to tobacco and alcohol
- Personal safety behaviors and perceptions
- Violence-related behaviors
- Diet and exercise
- Extracurricular activities
- Sexual activity and HIV/AIDS knowledge
- Health conditions and access to care
- Individual, peer, community and family influences on risk behaviors

How are the data used by state agencies, local health departments, schools, and other groups?

OHT data are used to help evaluate the effectiveness of a variety of projects and programs that promote healthy adolescence in Oregon. They are a key source of state and national leading health indicators, such as those included in the Oregon Benchmarks and Healthy People 2010.

Survey findings serve as a valuable tool for legislators and other policy makers as they make decisions about health related policies, services, programs, and educational activities. Agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups use the data to provide base-line and evaluation information required for grants and other funding sources, and for planning and evaluating activities and programs that promote health and ability to learn, prevent injury, and reduce high risk behaviors among youth. Many Oregon counties and local communities use OHT survey information in community health assessments.

Many schools and communities can use the results from this survey in the process of obtaining Safe and Drug Free Schools funding and other grants to enhance local prevention resources. Obtaining such funding relies on the proven strategy of being able to demonstrate need and

provide accountability by measuring outcomes.

Parents, school staff members, and community groups can use the information to identify areas where help is most needed for students to change behavior, and they can use that opportunity to develop and support activities and environments that encourage healthy behaviors.

Your questions, concerns, and comments are invited.

For more information contact:

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Website for survey information, data tables and reports:

<http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/chs/yrbsdata.htm>