

## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)**

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), in partnership with the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), administers the YRBS biennially to measure the prevalence of priority health risk behaviors among students in grades ninth through twelve.

This document provides answers to important questions regarding the YRBS.

### **Q. Why is the survey conducted?**

- A. The SCDE and DHEC are responsible for identifying and monitoring factors that may affect the health of our youth. South Carolina uses the results from the surveys to (1) monitor priority health risk behaviors among middle and high school students over time; (2) evaluate the impact of broad national, state, and local efforts to prevent risk behaviors; and (3) improve school health education policies and programs.

### **Q. What topics are included on the surveys?**

- A. The YRBS focuses on priority health risk behaviors established during youth that result in significantly higher risks for illness and death during both youth and adulthood. These include: behaviors that result in unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unintended pregnancies; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity. In addition, the YRBS also assesses the prevalence of obesity and asthma.

### **Q. Are sensitive questions asked?**

- A. Some questions may be considered sensitive by some schools or school districts. AIDS, HIV infection, and other STDs are major health problems. Sexual intercourse and intravenous drug use are among the behaviors known to increase the risk of HIV or other STDs. The only way to determine if adolescents are at risk of becoming infected with HIV or other STDs is to ask questions about these behaviors. Attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, and weapon-carrying also may be considered sensitive topics. Questions are presented in a straightforward yet sensitive manner.

### **Q. Is student participation anonymous? How is student privacy protected?**

- A. Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. Students complete the self-administered questionnaire by recording their responses directly on a computer-scanned answer sheet that contains no personal identifiers. Students also are encouraged to use an extra sheet of paper to cover their responses as they complete the questionnaire. Students not participating in the survey are provided with an alternative activity by their school. Published reports do not include names of schools or students.

### **Q. Who will be surveyed?**

- A. Fifty high schools from across the state have been randomly selected by the CDC to administer the survey. Generally, two to five classes are randomly selected to participate. All students in the randomly selected classes will be asked to participate.

### **Q. Are students tracked over time to see how their behavior changes?**

- A. No. Each year a new sample of schools and students is drawn. Students who participate cannot be tracked because no identifying information is collected.

**Q. When will the surveys be conducted?**

- A. The YRBS survey is typically conducted in the fall of odd-numbered years. The state survey coordinator will work with schools to schedule the survey administration at a time that works best for the schools between September and November 2021.

**Q. How are the surveys coordinated at each school?**

- A. Each school is asked to designate a contact person to work with the state survey coordinator. This can be the principal, another administrator, a teacher, or someone else designated by the principal. The school contact person provides a list of class sections, sends out parental notices for the sampled classes, helps promote the survey, and ensures a high participation rate. The SCDE will provide all materials required (e.g., questionnaires, answer sheets, parental notices, and pencils). Surveys are usually administered by someone from the school. However, if no one from the school is available, please contact the state coordinator.

**Q. How long does it take to complete the surveys? Is there some sort of physical test?**

- A. One class period is needed for the self-administered questionnaire. It takes approximately ten minutes for the survey administrator to distribute survey materials and read directions to the students. It then takes about 30 minutes for students to record their responses. No physical test or exam is involved.

**Q. Do students answer questions truthfully?**

- A. Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. Internal reliability checks help to identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know that procedures have been followed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation.

**Q. What about parental consent?**

- A. This survey is not funded by the United States Department of Education, so active parental consent is not required. However, parents must be directly notified about the survey and allowed to indicate if they do not want their child to participate. Parent notification forms can be sent home by students, mailed, or emailed. These forms will be supplied to the school by the SCDE for this purpose.

**Q. What if school districts, schools, or students do not choose to participate?**

- A. Participation in the surveys is voluntary. However, to develop accurate estimates of health risk behaviors among adolescents, participation rates must be high. Selected schools and students cannot be replaced. The goal is to achieve a 90 to 95 percent participation rate by selected schools and students.

**Q. Where can I find additional information about the surveys?**

- A. To obtain additional information, please contact the state survey coordinator:

**YRBS Coordinator**

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