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New survey results give a window into teen behavior and risks

Survey includes information on alcohol, tobacco, and drug use

OLYMPIA — A new survey of Washington students shows most are making good choices about their health. Still, far too many regularly use alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and engage in risky behavior.

The Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) focuses on health risk behaviors. The anonymous voluntary survey is taken every two years by more than 210,000 public school kids around the state in grades six, eight, 10, and 12. It covers many topics young people face — drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; weapons in schools; gangs; gambling; physical activity; suicide; bullying; and more.

Overall, drug use, alcohol use, tobacco use, and obesity rates haven't changed much since the last survey in 2006. Still, there's cause for concern. Almost one in five 10th-graders reported having five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks. About one in 10 students in 10th and 12th grades say they used a prescription painkiller to get high.

“Because their brains are still developing, kids who use alcohol and other drugs are at much greater risk for addiction and other problems than adults,” said Stan Marshburn, interim secretary of the state Department of Social and Health Services. “It’s important for parents to set clear rules, talk with their children starting in elementary school, and keep at it through their teens.” Parents can get [proven tips on how to talk with their kids](http://www.StartTalkingNow.org) (www.StartTalkingNow.org) online.

Since the Department of Health began its Tobacco Prevention and Control Program in 2000, overall smoking rates among youth have dropped by about half. As for enforcement of tobacco-free policies here in Klickitat County, a higher percentage of 10th and 12th grade students reported tobacco free policies being enforced at school compared to their peers around WA State. Scott Roy, a Public Educator with Klickitat County Health Department says, “We appreciate the ongoing efforts of our local schools as the enforcement of tobacco free policies in schools is a key component in preventing youth tobacco use.”

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Pam Wright, Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist with Klickitat County's Health Department states that according to the HYS; "When it comes to community rewards for pro-social involvement the percent of students who are resilient to substance use because they report rewards by their community surpasses the perceptions of their peers across all grades surveyed from the rest of the state. All of this tells us that we have to continue sending positive and consistent messages and providing positive activities for our young people throughout the threads of our communities. We need every person to be involved; community agencies, schools, law enforcement, the faith community and businesses. We can do this through modeling healthy behaviors in our own lives and by looking at the environment that we live in and bringing about the changes that we want to see in our communities."

For more information on this survey please contact either Scott Roy or Pam Wright at 509-493-1558 or go on line to www.klickitatcounty.org

Survey results are used to plan, implement, and evaluate youth programs around the state. The survey is a joint effort of the Department of Health, Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Liquor Control Board, the Family Policy Council, and the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development. The Healthy Youth Survey (www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/healthy_youth_2008) and fact sheets with more information are online.