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San Francisco Unified School District

Middle School Health Survey– Executive Summary



*1999 Results and Trend Data from 1991
to 1999*

Overview

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) was developed by the Division of Adolescent and School Health, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in collaboration with representatives from 71 state and local departments of education and 19 other federal agencies. Its main purpose is to monitor priority health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of morbidity, mortality and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

San Francisco Unified School District has taken part in the YRBSS since 1991. The District data are used to monitor the health behaviors of San Francisco's youth, guide program planning, and evaluate some of the District's school-based health programs.

The survey is administered to a random sample of classes at the middle school level every other year. The average sample size across the years is approximately 2,000 students per survey. The last year of the survey was 1999. The next survey is scheduled for spring 2001.

1999 Survey

During the 1999 spring semester, the Middle School YRBS was administered to a random sample of 2,122 students in grades six through eight. Parent/guardian consent forms (in six languages) were sent home with students in selected classes. Only students with positive parent/guardian permission were allowed to complete the survey. The survey was administered by staff who had been trained in proper methods of survey administration, including protecting students' anonymity. Student participation was voluntary. They could decline to participate, turn in blank or incomplete surveys, or stop completing the survey at any time.

The results show some encouraging findings, but also show that a notable proportion of middle school youth are engaging in behaviors that could result in serious health consequences. Key findings from the 1999 survey are highlighted below.

Unintentional and Intentional Injuries

- Nearly three-fourths (74%) of students reported wearing a seat belt most or all of the time.
- In the month prior to surveying, 21% of the students had ridden in a vehicle with someone who had been drinking alcohol.
- Fifteen percent of the students had carried a knife, 6% had carried a club, and 4% had carried a gun as a weapon at some time in their lives; 2% had carried a knife or club and 1% had carried a gun *on school property*.
- Nearly half (49%) of students had been in a physical fight in the past year.
- Fifteen percent of students had not attended school at some time because they felt they would be unsafe there.
- One in five (21%) of students said they had seriously thought about ending their life; 8% had attempted suicide.

- In the 30 days prior to the survey, students had been the victims of verbal slurs because of their ethnicity (16%), physical appearance (22%), or gender or sexual orientation (7%).

Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drug Use

- Nearly one-third of students (32%) has tried smoking cigarettes.
- Just over one-third of students (35%) have tried alcohol.
- In the month prior to the survey, 5% of students reported heavy drinking--consuming five or more drinks within a couple of hours.
- Just over 1 in 10 students (12%) reported using marijuana at some time in their life; 5% reported cocaine use.
- One in 10 students reported using inhalants such as glue, spray cans, or paints to get high.

Sexual Behaviors

- Most students (90%) have not had sexual intercourse.
- Of those students who have had sexual intercourse, 33% reported having had sex with three or more partners, and 28% used no method of protection at last intercourse.
- Of those students who have had sexual intercourse, 7% had been told by a doctor or nurse that they had a sexually transmitted disease.

Dietary and Exercise Behaviors

- The majority of students (72%) reported having done aerobic activity on three or more days in the week prior to the survey.
- On an average school day, 57% of middle school students reported watching three or more hours of TV.

Results that Show Positive Gains over the Past Decade

In analyzing the data from 1991 to 1999, there have been notable positive changes in most health areas. Key findings are summarized below.

Unintentional and Intentional Injuries

- More students are using seat belts
- More students are using bicycle helmets
- Fewer students are carrying knives
- Fewer students are carrying guns
- Fewer students are fighting
- Fewer students are reporting suicide attempts

Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drug Use

- Fewer students have tried smoking
- Fewer students have tried alcohol since a peak in 1995

Sexual Behaviors

- Fewer students are having sex
- Of those students who reported having sex, more of them are using condoms
- Of those students who reported having sex, fewer of them reported having three or more sexual partners in their lifetime
- Of those students who reported having sex, fewer of them reported having had a sexually transmitted disease in their lifetime
- Nearly 9 of 10 students (86%) agreed or strongly agreed that not having sexual intercourse is a better choice than having sexual intercourse for students their age. (This was a new item on the 1999 survey and was not included on previous surveys.)

Dietary and Exercise Behaviors

- The majority of students continue to report participation in adequate aerobic activity (defined as three or more days in the past week)

Summary of Positive Trends: Middle School Youth			
Indicator	1991 Rate	1999 Rate	Percentage Point Change
<i>Unintentional and Intentional Injuries</i>			
Seat belt use (general use)	56%	74%	+18
Bicycle helmet use (past year)	6%	26%	+20
Carrying knife (past month)	21%*	15%	-6
Carrying gun (past month)	9%*	4%	-5
Fighting (past 12 months)	56%	49%	-7
Attempted suicide (ever)	13%**	8%	-5
<i>Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drug Use</i>			
Cigarette use (ever)	39%	32%	-7
Alcohol use (ever)	50%‡	35%	-15
<i>Sexual Behaviors</i>			
Sexual intercourse (ever)	16%	10%	-6
Condom use (last intercourse, among sexually experienced)	56	62	+6
Three or more sex partners (lifetime, among sexually experienced)	41	33	-8
Reported STD (ever)	19%	7%	-12

Dietary and Exercise Behaviors

Adequate aerobic exercise (past week)	72%	72%	0
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* First measured in 1995; ** 1991 question asked about past year, 1999 question asked about ever; ‡ reflects peak rate in 1995 and 1997.

Results that Show Continued Risk

Unfortunately, students continue to be at risk in many health areas. Several risk behaviors have increased over the years. Trend data show continued risk in the following areas.

Tobacco, Alcohol, and Other Drug Use

- There have been slight increases in lifetime marijuana, cocaine, and inhalant use since 1991 (marijuana: 10% in 1991 versus 12% in 1999; cocaine: 1% in 1991 versus 5% in 1999; inhalants: 7% in 1991 versus 10% in 1999).

Dietary and Exercise Behaviors

- Fewer students are participating in strengthening exercises (61% in 1993 when it was first assessed versus 52% in 1999)
- Fewer students are participating in stretching exercises (73% in 1993 when it was first assessed versus 66% in 1999)

Other behaviors have remained relatively stable over the years or have even declined slightly, but they are still occurring among a notable proportion of youth. Key findings from the 1999 survey that show continued risk are highlighted in the following table.

Key Findings From 1999 Suggesting Continued Risk: Middle School Youth	
Indicator	1999 Rate
<i>Unintentional and intentional injuries</i>	
Riding with driver who has been drinking (past month)	21%
Fighting (past 12 months)	49%
Experienced verbal slurs due to:	
Ethnicity	16%
Physical appearance	22%
Gender or sexual orientation	7%
Suicidal thoughts (ever)	21%
<i>Tobacco, Alcohol, and Other Drug Use</i>	
Alcohol use (past month)	14%
Marijuana use (ever)	12%
Cocaine use (ever)	5%
Inhalant use (ever)	10%
<i>Sexual Behaviors</i>	
Three or more sex partners (lifetime, among sexually active)	33%

Key Findings From 1999 Suggesting Continued Risk: Middle School Youth

Indicator	1999 Rate
Use of alcohol or drugs before last intercourse (among sexually active)	26%
No use of protection at last intercourse (among sexually active)	28%

Summary

Based on the health survey data collected since 1991 from middle school students in San Francisco, it appears that many students are making some *positive behavior changes*. In general, students are:

- taking more safety precautions (e.g., using seat belts and bicycle helmets more often);
- fighting and carrying weapons less often;
- less likely to attempt suicide;
- less likely to have ever tried cigarettes and alcohol;
- less likely to have sexual intercourse;
- more likely to use condoms if they do have sex; and
- continuing to engage in adequate aerobic activity.

Some students also are *at risk* for numerous health problems. For example, based on 1999 data notable proportions of youth are:

- riding in a vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol;
- fighting;
- experiencing verbal slurs due to their ethnicity, physical appearance, and/or gender or sexual orientation;
- contemplating suicide;
- using alcohol, marijuana and other drugs (e.g., inhalants);
- engaging in sexual risk taking behaviors, such as reporting multiple partners, using alcohol and drugs before having sex, or choosing not to use any protection against pregnancy or disease; and
- foregoing strengthening and stretching exercises.