

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) 2021 Standard Questionnaire Item Rationale

Obesity, Overweight, and Weight Control

QUESTION(S):

6. How tall are you without your shoes on?
7. How much do you weigh without your shoes on?
66. How do you describe your weight?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure self-reported height and weight and perceived body weight. Data on self-reported height and weight are used to calculate body mass index (BMI) and determine the corresponding BMI percentile for adolescents. BMI percentile takes into account that young people are still growing and are growing at different rates depending on their age and sex. CDC recommends using BMI percentile when assessing weight status for youth ages 2–20. Although BMI calculated from self-reported height and weight underestimates the prevalence of obesity compared to BMI calculated from measured height and weight,^(1,2) self-reported height and weight are useful for tracking BMI trends over time.⁽³⁻⁵⁾

Children with obesity are at higher risk of having other chronic health conditions and diseases that influence physical health. These include asthma, sleep apnea, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes, and risk factors for heart disease.⁽⁶⁻⁸⁾ Obesity has psychological consequences as well; youth with obesity are bullied and teased more than their normal weight peers and are more likely to suffer from social isolation, depression, and lower self-esteem.^(9,10) In the long term, youth with obesity are more likely to have obesity as an adult.^(11,12)

Continued monitoring of height and weight data through the YRBS provides information at the national, state, and local levels that can be used to track progress in efforts to curb the spread of obesity.⁽³⁾ The YRBS is the only survey that provides obesity data among high school students that is representative at the state and local level. Nationwide in 2019, 16% of high school students had obesity and 16% were overweight.⁽¹³⁾ During 1999–2019, significant linear increases occurred in the percentage of students with obesity (11%–16%) and who were overweight (14%–16%).

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QUESTION(S):

67. Which of the following are you trying to do about your weight?

RATIONALE:

This question measures weight goals. The prevention of childhood obesity involves maintaining a healthy weight while protecting overall health, growth and development, and nutritional status.⁽¹⁾ The *Expert Committee Recommendations Regarding the Prevention, Assessment, and Treatment of Child and Adolescent Overweight and Obesity* recommend that overweight adolescents (85th percentile < BMI < 95th percentile) achieve a healthy weight by maintaining their current weight while stature increases; adolescents with obesity (BMI >95th percentile) can pursue weight loss that is not to exceed an average of 2 pounds per week.⁽²⁾ The goals of obesity prevention in children and adolescents also include the avoidance of potentially harmful weight concern and restrictive eating behaviors.⁽³⁾ For these reasons, understanding adolescents' weight goals, both independently and relative to weight status, is of public health importance.⁽²⁾ Nationwide in 2019, 48% of high school students were trying to lose weight. The percentage of students who were trying to lose weight increased significantly during 1991–2019 (42%–48%).⁽⁴⁾

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Item Rationale for the 2021 Standard High School YRBS

Behaviors that Result in Unintentional Injuries

QUESTION(S):

8. How often do you wear a seat belt when riding in a car driven by someone else?

RATIONALE:

This question measures the frequency with which seat belts are worn when riding in a car driven by someone else. Motor vehicle crashes are the second leading cause of death among adolescents aged 13–19 years in the United States.⁽¹⁾ In 2018, 2,486 adolescents (aged 13–19 years) were killed and approximately 285,000 were treated in emergency departments for motor vehicle crash-related injuries.⁽¹⁾ When used correctly, seat belts reduce the risk of death and serious injury in crashes for passenger car occupants by about half.^(2,3) However, in 2018, among all fatally injured 13- to 19-year-old occupants, seat belt use among passengers (36%) was considerably lower than among drivers (48%).⁽⁴⁾ In 2019, approximately 43% of high school students nationwide did not always wear a seat belt when riding in a car driven by someone else.⁽⁵⁾

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QUESTION(S):

9. During the past 30 days, how many times did you ride in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol?
10. During the past 30 days, how many times did you drive a car or other vehicle when you had been drinking alcohol?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure the frequency with which high school students drove a motor vehicle after drinking alcohol or rode as a passenger in a motor vehicle operated by someone who had been drinking alcohol. In 2017, 19% of 15- to 20-year-old drivers who were involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes had been drinking alcohol.⁽¹⁾ Among those young drivers who were involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes and had been drinking alcohol, 81% had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) equal to or above the legal threshold for adults (which is 0.08% in all states but Utah).⁽¹⁾ In 2018, approximately one-fifth of drivers 16–19 years of age who were killed in motor vehicle crashes had BACs at or above 0.08%.⁽²⁾ Even at BACs of 0.050%–0.079%, drivers 16–20 years of age are about 6 times as likely to be involved in a fatal crash as their sober counterparts.⁽³⁾ In 2019, among the approximately 60% of U.S. high school students who had driven a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey, 5% drove one or more times when they had been drinking alcohol.⁽⁴⁾ During 2013–2019, among U.S. high school students who had driven a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey, the prevalence of students who had driven one or more times when they had been drinking alcohol decreased from 10% to 5%.⁽⁵⁾

Riding with a driver of any age who has been drinking alcohol is dangerous. Riding with a drinking driver is also associated with adolescent drinking and driving.^(4,6) In addition, longitudinal research indicates that adolescents who ride with impaired drivers at a young age are more likely to drive while impaired themselves as they get older and start driving.^(4,7) In 2019, among high school students nationwide, 17% had ridden in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol at least once during the 30 days before the survey.⁽⁴⁾ Among students nationwide, the prevalence of riding with a driver who had been drinking alcohol decreased during 1991–2009 (40%–28%) and then further decreased during 2009–2019 (28%–17%).⁽⁵⁾

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QUESTION(S):

11. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you text or e-mail while driving a car or other vehicle?

RATIONALE:

This question measures the frequency with which students engage in texting or e-mailing while driving a motor vehicle. Motor vehicle crashes are the second leading cause of death among U.S. adolescents aged 13–19.⁽¹⁾ Drivers aged 15–19 are overrepresented in distraction-affected fatal crashes and distraction-affected fatal crashes that involve cell phone use.⁽²⁾ In 2018, 8% of all drivers aged 15–19 involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crash, and 17% of these distracted teens were distracted by the use of cell phones.⁽²⁾ The performance of distracting secondary tasks while driving, such as texting while driving, significantly increases risk for a crash or near-crash among novice, inexperienced drivers.^(3,4) Texting while driving is an especially risky type of distracted driving, as it involves three types of driver distraction: visual, physical/manual, and cognitive.⁽⁵⁾ Teen drivers are more vulnerable to the effects of distraction^(3,6,7) and are less able to disengage from distracting behaviors as road hazards emerge than adults.⁽⁸⁾ In 2019, among the approximately 60% of high school students nationwide who had driven a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey, the prevalence of texting while driving one or more times in the 30 days before the survey was 39%.⁽⁹⁾ The prevalence of

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texting while driving among high school students who had driven a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey has not changed significantly since this question was first included in the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System questionnaires in 2013.⁽¹⁰⁾

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Behaviors that Result in Violence

QUESTION(S):

12. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?
13. During the past 12 months, on how many days did you carry a gun? (Do not count the days when you carried a gun only for hunting or for a sport, such as target shooting.)
14. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school?
15. During the past 12 months, how many times has someone threatened or injured you with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure violence-related behaviors and school-related violent behaviors. Violence is a significant public health issue among youth, with homicide being the third leading cause of death among youth ages 13–19 years (6.3 per 100,000).⁽¹⁾ Homicide is the leading cause of death among non-Hispanic black youth ages 13–19 years (25.6 per 100,000) and the third leading cause of death for Hispanic youth ages 13–19 years (5.2 per 100,000).⁽¹⁾ Approximately 10% of homicide victims in the United States in 2018 were aged 13–19 years; of these victims, 90% were killed with a firearm.⁽¹⁾ Of all violent deaths that occurred on school property among youth aged 13–19 years between July 1994 and June 2018, 71% involved firearms.⁽²⁾ Nearly 100% of school districts have a policy prohibiting weapon possession or use by high school students on school property.⁽³⁾ Also, in 2018, almost 170,000 (577.4 per 100,000) nonfatal, physical assault injuries among youth aged 13–19 years were treated in U.S. emergency departments.⁽¹⁾

Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 13% had carried a weapon and 3% had carried a weapon on school property on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.⁽⁴⁾ The prevalence of having carried a weapon decreased significantly 1991–2019 (26%–13%).⁽⁴⁾ The prevalence of having carried a weapon on school property decreased during 1993–1997 (12%–9%) and then decreased more slowly during 1997–2019 (9%–3%).⁽⁴⁾ For the first time in 2017, the question assessing prevalence of having carried a gun during the 12 months before the survey instructed respondents not to count the days when they carried a gun only for hunting or for a sport, such as target shooting. In 2019, 4% of high school students carried a gun (not counting the days when they carried a gun only for hunting or for a sport, such as target shooting) during the 12 months before the survey, decreasing slightly from 5% in 2017.⁽⁴⁾

Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 9% had not gone to school on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school and 7% had been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property

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one or more times during the 12 months before the survey.⁽⁴⁾ Among students nationwide, the prevalence of having not gone to school because of safety concerns increased significantly during 1993–2019 (4%–9%).⁽⁴⁾ Among students nationwide, the prevalence of having been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property did not change significantly during 1993–2003 (7%–9%) and then decreased during 2003–2019 (9%–7%).⁽⁴⁾

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QUESTION(S):

16. During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight?
17. During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight on school property?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure the frequency of physical fights in general and on school property during the 12 months before the survey. Physical fighting is a marker for other problem behaviors⁽¹⁾ and is associated with serious injury-related health outcomes.^(2,3) Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 22% had been in a physical fight and 8% had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times during the 12 months before the survey.⁽⁴⁾ The percentage of high school students who were in a physical fight decreased during 1991–2011 (43%–33%) and then decreased further during 2011–2019 (33%–22%).⁽⁴⁾ The percentage of high school students who were in a physical fight on school property also decreased significantly during 1993–2019 (16%–8%).⁽⁴⁾

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QUESTION(S):

18. Have you ever seen someone get physically attacked, beaten, stabbed, or shot in your neighborhood?

RATIONALE:

Witnessing neighborhood violence has not been measured by the YRBS before, but data from a 2015 Monroe County survey found that 19% of students had seen someone shot, stabbed, or beaten in their community.⁽¹⁾ In addition, data from a 2009 survey of New York State adult residents found that 25% of adults sampled indicated they were exposed to violence in their community before age 18.⁽²⁾ The World Health Organization considers exposure to community violence to be an adverse childhood experience.⁽³⁾ Measuring exposure to community violence is important because adverse childhood experiences are a focus area of CDC, and this measure seeks to capture the community context for violence.

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https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/activities/adverse_childhood_experiences/en/.

QUESTION(S):

19. Have you ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?
20. During the past 12 months, how many times did anyone force you to do sexual things that you did not want to do? (Count such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.)
21. During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with force you to do sexual things that you did not want to do? (Count such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.)
22. During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with physically hurt you on purpose? (Count such things as being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon.)

RATIONALE:

These questions measure the frequency of sexual violence and dating violence experienced by students. Sexual and dating violence victimization are associated with a range of negative consequences including suicide ideation and attempts, major depressive episodes, increased alcohol, tobacco, and other substance use, eating disorders, and risky sexual behavior.⁽¹⁻⁶⁾ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 1 in 5 U.S. women have experienced (completed or attempted) rape and 1 in 14 U.S. men have been made to sexually penetrate someone else (completed or attempted) in their lifetime; among female victims of rape, 43.2% were under 18 years old at the time of their first victimization, and among male victims of being made to penetrate, 25.9% were under 18 at the time of the first victimization.⁽⁷⁾ About 1 in 4 women (23.2%) and 1 in 7 men (13.9%) have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner (e.g., hit with a fist or something hard, beaten, slammed against something) at some point in their lifetime.⁽⁸⁾ Among adults who ever experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, 25.6% of women and 14.4% of men first experienced some form of violence by that partner between 11 and 17 years of age.⁽⁸⁾

All three sexual violence questions are important for understanding the public health burden of sexual violence against young people, guiding prevention strategies, and monitoring changes over time. These data are particularly useful for monitoring changes in trends and the effects of prevention efforts such as CDC's Rape Prevention Education Program.⁽⁹⁾ Data on forced sexual activity by any perpetrator — not just a dating partner — provides a better understanding of the burden of sexual violence among high school students because studies have shown that

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perpetrators can include current or former friends, acquaintances, family members, and other adults.^(7,10) Preventing sexual violence by any perpetrator and dating violence are focus areas for CDC because they are types of adverse childhood experiences. Knowing the proportion of high school students who are sexually and physically victimized by a dating partner is also crucial because it provides a more complete measure of teen dating violence and prevention strategies often focus specifically on violence in dating relationships. These estimates are critically important for monitoring progress in this area.

In 2019, 7% of high school students nationwide had ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to.⁽¹¹⁾ The percentage of high school students who had ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to decreased significantly during 2001–2019 (8%–7%).⁽¹¹⁾ Among the students who dated or went out with someone during the 12 months before the survey, 8% experienced physical dating violence by a dating partner, and 8% experienced sexual dating violence by a dating partner.⁽¹²⁾ The percentage of high school students who experienced physical dating violence and sexual dating violence both decreased significantly during 2013–2019 (10%–8%).⁽¹¹⁾ Nationwide, 11% of students experienced sexual violence by anyone one or more times during the 12 months before the survey.⁽¹²⁾

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QUESTION(S):

23. During the past 12 months, have you ever been bullied on school property?
24. During the past 12 months, have you ever been electronically bullied? (Count being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media.)

RATIONALE:

These questions measure the frequency of bullying victimization. Bullying victimization is associated with depression,⁽¹⁻²⁾ suicidal ideation,^(1,3-4) self-injury,⁽¹⁾ suicide attempts,^(1,3-4) increased odds of repeated common health problems,⁽⁵⁾ school absenteeism,⁽⁶⁾ psychological distress,⁽⁵⁾ externalizing problems,⁽⁷⁾ sleep disturbances,⁽³⁾ and feeling unsafe at school.⁽⁶⁾ Electronic bullying victimization has been associated with discipline problems in school, skipping school, weapon carrying,⁽⁸⁾ psychological distress,⁽⁹⁾ lower self-esteem,⁽¹⁰⁾ depression,⁽¹⁾ suicidal ideation,⁽⁴⁾ self-injury,⁽¹⁾ and suicide attempts.^(1,4) Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 20% reported that they had been bullied on school property during the 12 months before the survey and 16% had been electronically bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media during the 12 months before the survey.⁽¹¹⁾ No significant trends over time were observed for either bullying on school property or electronic bullying.

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Item Rationale for the 2021 Standard High School YRBS

Suicide and Mental Health

QUESTION(S):

25. During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?
26. During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?
27. During the past 12 months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?
28. During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?
29. If you attempted suicide during the past 12 months, did any attempt result in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse?
85. During the past 30 days, how often was your mental health not good? (Poor mental health includes stress, anxiety, and depression.)

RATIONALE:

These questions measure sadness, suicidal ideation and planning, attempted suicide, and the severity of suicide attempts. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 13–19 years.⁽¹⁾ The suicide rate for persons aged 13–19 years was 9.6 per 100,000 in 2018. ⁽¹⁾ A prior suicide attempt is one of the most significant risk factors for a suicide fatality.^(2,3) Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 37% felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.⁽⁴⁾ Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 19% had seriously considered attempting suicide, 16% had made a plan about how they would attempt suicide, 9% had attempted suicide one or more times, and 3% had a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse (injured in a suicide attempt) during the 12 months before the survey.⁽⁴⁾ The percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide decreased during 1991–2007 (29%–15%) and then increased slightly during 2007–2019 (15%–16%).⁽⁵⁾ The percentage of students who made a suicide plan decreased during 1991–2009 (19%–11%) and then increased during 2009–2019 (11%–16%).⁽⁵⁾ The percentage of students who attempted suicide slightly increased during 1991–2019 (7%–9%).⁽⁵⁾ No significant trends over time were observed for being injured in a suicide attempt.

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Item Rationale for the 2021 Standard High School YRBS

Tobacco Use

QUESTION(S):

30. Have you ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs?
31. How old were you when you first tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs?
32. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?
33. During the past 30 days, on the days you smoked, how many cigarettes did you smoke per day?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure lifetime and current smoking patterns, and age of initiation. Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States⁽¹⁾ and accounts for approximately 440,000 deaths each year.^(1,2) Each day across the United States more than 3,800 youth under 18 years of age start smoking and more than 80% of adult smokers begin before the age of 18.⁽³⁾ Cigarette smoking increases risk of heart disease; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; acute respiratory illness; stroke; and cancers of the lung, larynx, oral cavity, pharynx, pancreas, and cervix.^(1,3) In addition, as compared to nonsmokers, cigarette smokers are more likely to drink alcohol, use marijuana and cocaine, engage in risky sexual behaviors, engage in physical fighting, carry a weapon, and attempt suicide.⁽³⁻⁴⁾ Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 24% had ever tried cigarette smoking and 6% had smoked cigarettes on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.⁽⁵⁾ The percentage of high school students who had ever tried cigarette smoking did not change during 1991–1999 and then decreased significantly during 1999–2019 (70%–24%).^(5,6) The percentage of high school students who had smoked cigarettes on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey increased significantly during 1991–1997 (28%–36%) and then decreased during 1997–2019 (36%–6%).^(5,6)

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QUESTION(S):

34. Have you ever used an electronic vapor product?
35. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use an electronic vapor product?
36. During the past 30 days, how did you usually get your electronic vapor products?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure the prevalence of use of electronic vapor products and access to these products. Electronic vapor products are battery-powered electronic devices that usually contain a nicotine-based liquid that is vaporized and inhaled by the user.⁽¹⁾ Electronic vapor products come in many shapes and sizes, and may be shaped like cigarettes or other tobacco products, USB devices, pen-shaped devices, or tank-style devices. Electronic vapor products include electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), vapes, vape pens, electronic cigars (e-cigars), electronic hookahs (e-hookahs), hookah pens, and mods. Depending on the brand, e-cigarette cartridges or refillable e-liquids typically contain nicotine, a component to produce the aerosol (e.g., propylene glycol or glycerol), and flavorings (e.g., fruit, mint, or chocolate).⁽²⁾

According to the National Youth Tobacco Survey, e-cigarettes have remained the most commonly used tobacco product among high school students since 2014.⁽³⁾ Recognizing this as a key component of youth tobacco product use surveillance, the YRBS has assessed the use of

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electronic vapor products since 2015.⁽⁴⁾ Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 50% had ever tried electronic vapor products and 33% of high school students had used electronic vapor products on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey. From 2017-2019, a significant increase was found in current use of electronic vapor products (13%-33%).⁽⁵⁾

In 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration finalized a rule to regulate e-cigarettes and other electronic vapor products as tobacco products.⁽⁶⁾ This rule prevented sales to minors, prohibited samples, prohibited vending machine sales (unless in a facility that never admits minors), and mandates warning labels on packaging.⁽⁶⁾ On December 20, 2019, legislation amended the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and raised the federal minimum age of sale of tobacco products from 18 to 21 years of age.⁽⁷⁾ Given this evolving landscape, continued monitoring of how youth usually get their e-cigarettes will be important to inform surveillance and evaluation efforts in identifying potential shifts in youth e-cigarette access patterns. The question assessing access to electronic vapor products was revised for 2021 to provide a more distinct response option for social sources inclusive of both paid and unpaid means of obtaining e-cigarettes.

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QUESTION(S):

37. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, snus, or dissolvable tobacco products, such as Copenhagen, Grizzly, Skoal, or Camel Snus? (Do not count any electronic vapor products.)
38. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure smokeless tobacco use and cigar use. Smokeless tobacco products include chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, snus or dissolvable tobacco products.⁽¹⁾ The smokeless tobacco brands provided as examples reflect the most commonly used brands based on market-share data.⁽²⁾ Smokeless tobacco contains 28 known human carcinogens.⁽¹⁾ Use of smokeless tobacco products increases the risk of developing cancer of the oral cavity.⁽¹⁾ Other oral health problems strongly associated with smokeless tobacco use are leukoplakia (a lesion of the soft tissue that consists of a white patch or plaque that cannot be scraped off) and recession of the gums.^(1,3,4) Smokeless tobacco use also causes an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.⁽⁵⁾ In addition, adolescent smokeless tobacco users are more likely than nonusers to become adult cigarette smokers.⁽⁴⁾ Smokeless tobacco may appeal to youth because it can come in flavors such as mint, fruit, or spice.⁽⁴⁾ Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 4% had used smokeless tobacco (e.g., chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip) on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.⁽⁶⁾ Smokeless tobacco use significantly declined from 2017-2019 (from 6% to 4%).⁽⁶⁾

Cigar smoking can cause lung cancer, coronary heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.⁽⁷⁻⁹⁾ The overall risk of oral and pharyngeal cancer is 7–10 times higher among cigar smokers compared to those who never smoked.⁽¹⁰⁾ In 2019, 6% of high school students nationwide had smoked cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey; a significant decrease in overall prevalence of current cigar smoking from 2017 (8.0%).⁽⁶⁾

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QUESTION(S):

39. During the past 12 months, did you ever try to quit using all tobacco products?

RATIONALE:

This question measures attempts to quit using all tobacco products. Nicotine exposure during adolescence, a critical period for brain development, can cause addiction, might harm brain development, and could lead to sustained tobacco product use among youths.^(1,2,3) Therefore, among youth, there is no safe exposure to nicotine, be it from combustible, non-combustible, or electronic sources. Before 2017, the YRBS assessed the prevalence of high school students who attempted to quit smoking cigarettes during the 12 months before the survey. The questionnaire item was expanded in 2017 to include all tobacco products. In 2019, among high school students nationwide who used any tobacco products during the 12 months before the survey, 48% had tried to quit using all tobacco products during those 12 months.⁽⁴⁾

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Alcohol

QUESTION(S):

40. How old were you when you had your first drink of alcohol other than a few sips?
41. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have at least one drink of alcohol?
42. During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have 4 or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is, within a couple of hours (if you are female) or 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is, within a couple of hours (if you are male)?
43. During the past 30 days, what is the largest number of alcoholic drinks you had in a row, that is, within a couple of hours?
44. During the past 30 days, how did you usually get the alcohol you drank?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure lifetime and current use of alcohol, age of initiation, binge drinking, the largest number of alcoholic drinks consumed during a drinking occasion, and access to alcohol. Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 4,300 deaths among underage youth each year, and drinking by individuals younger than age 21 years cost the U.S. \$24 billion in 2010.^(1,2) Underage drinking contributes to a wide range of health and social problems, including motor vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence (e.g., physical and sexual assaults), unintentional injuries (e.g., burns, falls, drownings), sexual risk behaviors, academic and memory problems, and alcohol and drug poisonings.⁽³⁻⁵⁾ Early initiation of drinking is also associated with suicide and an increased risk of developing alcohol and substance use disorders later in life.^(3,5-7) Binge drinking is the most common pattern of excessive alcohol use in the United States, and most people younger than age 21 who drink alcohol report binge drinking, often consuming large amounts of alcohol.^(3,8) More than two in five high school students who reported binge drinking consumed eight or more drinks in a row.⁽⁸⁾ The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines binge drinking as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration to 0.08% or above. This typically happens when males consume 5 or more drinks and when females consume 4 or more drinks in about 2 hours.⁽⁹⁾ Limiting youth access to alcohol has reduced underage alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.^(10,11) However, youth continue to obtain alcohol from a variety of sources, particularly from adults of legal drinking age.⁽¹²⁾

Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 15% reported they had their first drink of alcohol (more than a few sips) before age 13⁽¹²⁾ and 29% reported they drank at least one drink of alcohol during the 30 days before the survey.⁽¹³⁾ In addition, 14% of high school students reported binge drinking during the 30 days before the survey.⁽¹³⁾ The percentage of high school students who reported current alcohol use decreased significantly during 1991–2019 (from 51% to 29%).⁽¹²⁾ Likewise, the percentage of high school students reporting alcohol initiation younger than 13 years decreased significantly during 1991–2019 and the percentage reporting 10 or more

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drinks as the largest number of drinks during an occasion decreased significantly during 2013-2019.⁽¹²⁾

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Other Drug Use

QUESTION(S):

45. During your life, how many times have you used marijuana?
46. How old were you when you tried marijuana for the first time?
47. During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana?
48. During your life, how many times have you used synthetic marijuana?
49. During your life, how many times have you taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told you to use it?
50. During your life, how many times have you used any form of cocaine, including powder, crack, or freebase?
51. During your life, how many times have you sniffed glue, breathed the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high?
52. During your life, how many times have you used heroin (also called smack, junk, or China White)?
53. During your life, how many times have you used methamphetamines (also called speed, crystal meth, crank, ice, or meth)?
54. During your life, how many times have you used ecstasy (also called MDMA or Molly)?
55. During your life, how many times have you used a needle to inject any illegal drug into your body?
56. During the past 12 months, has anyone offered, sold, or given you an illegal drug on school property?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure lifetime and current use of marijuana (including lifetime use of synthetic marijuana, also known as synthetic cannabinoids) and ever use of cocaine, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamines, ecstasy, and injected drugs; use of prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription, or used in a manner differently than instructed by the doctor; and illegal drug activity on school property. Among youth, illicit drug use is associated with heavy alcohol and tobacco use,⁽¹⁾ violence and delinquency,⁽²⁻⁴⁾ and suicide.⁽⁵⁾ Synthetic cannabinoids use has been linked with adverse effects such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, hallucinations, agitation, acute kidney injury, and

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death.⁽⁶⁾ Data also show that high school students who use synthetic cannabinoids tend to engage in more risky behaviors related to sex, substance use, and injury/violence than students who use marijuana only.⁽⁷⁾ All school districts prohibit illegal drug possession or use by students on school property.⁽⁸⁾

Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 37% had used marijuana, 7% had used synthetic cannabinoids, 4% had used any form of cocaine, 2% had used heroin, 2% had used methamphetamines, 4% had used ecstasy, and 14% had taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it one or more times during their life.⁽⁹⁾ In 2019, 6% of high school students nationwide had sniffed glue, breathed the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high and 2% had used a needle to inject any illegal drug into their body one or more times during their life.⁽⁹⁾ Also, 22% of students had been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property during the 12 months before the survey.⁽⁹⁾ The percentage of high school students who had used marijuana one or more times during their life increased during 1991–1997 (31%–47%) and then decreased during 1997–2019 (47%–37%).⁽⁹⁾ The percentage of high school students who had used cocaine one or more times during their life increased during 1991–2001 (6%–9%) and then decreased during 2001–2019 (9%–4%).⁽⁹⁾ The percentage of high school students who had used heroin one or more times during their life did not change significantly during 1999–2011 (2%–3%) then decreased slightly during 2011–2019 (3%–2%).⁽⁹⁾ The percentage of high school students who had used methamphetamines one or more times during their life decreased significantly during 1999–2019 (9%–2%).⁽⁹⁾ The percentage of high school students who had used ecstasy one or more times during their life decreased significantly from 2001–2019 (11%–4%).⁽⁹⁾

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Item Rationale for the 2021 Standard High School YRBS

Sexual Behaviors that Contribute to Unintended Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Including HIV Infection

QUESTION(S):

57. Have you ever had sexual intercourse?
58. How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?
59. During your life, with how many people have you had sexual intercourse?
60. During the past 3 months, with how many people did you have sexual intercourse?
61. Did you drink alcohol or use drugs before you had sexual intercourse the last time?
62. The last time you had sexual intercourse, did you or your partner use a condom?
63. The last time you had sexual intercourse with an opposite-sex partner, what one method did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure the prevalence of sexual activity, number of sexual partners, age at first intercourse, alcohol and other drug use related to sexual activity, condom use, and contraceptive use. Early initiation of sexual intercourse is associated with having a greater number of lifetime sexual partners.^(1,2) In addition, adolescents who initiate sexual intercourse early are less likely to use contraception^(2,3) and are at higher risk for STDs⁽⁴⁾ and pregnancy.^(5,6) Estimates suggest that while representing 25% of the ever sexually active population, persons aged 15 to 24 years acquire more than half of all new STDs.⁽⁷⁾ Both chlamydia and gonorrhea rates are high among young women between the ages of 20 and 24 years (4064.6 cases per 100,000 individuals and 702.6 cases per 100,000 individuals, respectively in 2018).⁽⁸⁾ In 2018 in the United States and dependent areas, there were an estimated 1,739 persons ages 13–19 years newly diagnosed with HIV infection and 5,035 living with diagnosed HIV infection.⁽⁹⁾ In 2018, young people aged 13–24 accounted for 21% of all new HIV infections in the United States.⁽⁹⁾

Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 38% had ever had sexual intercourse, 9% had had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life, and 27% had had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey.⁽¹⁰⁾ The percentage of students who ever had sexual intercourse decreased during 1991–2019 (54%–38%).⁽¹⁰⁾ The percentage of students who had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life decreased during 1991–2019 (19%–9%).⁽¹⁰⁾ During 1991–2013, there was a significant decrease in the percentage of students who had had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey (38%–34%), and the percentage further decreased during 2013–2019 (34%–27%).⁽¹⁰⁾ In 2019, among the 27% of students who were currently sexually active, 54% reported that either they or their partner had used a condom during last sexual intercourse.⁽¹¹⁾ The percentage of sexually active students who used a condom during last sexual intercourse increased during 1991–2005 (46%–63%) and then decreased during 2005–2019 (63%–54%).⁽¹⁰⁾

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HIV/STD Testing

QUESTION(S):

82. Have you ever been tested for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS? (Do not count tests done if you donated blood.)
83. During the past 12 months, have you been tested for a sexually transmitted disease (STD) other than HIV, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure whether high school students have ever been tested for HIV and if they have been tested for an STD during the 12 months before the survey. Because adolescents and young people contract HIV and other STDs at high rates,⁽¹⁻³⁾ national recommendations and clinical guidelines suggest HIV testing and regular STD testing for sexually active young people.⁽⁴⁻⁷⁾ HIV testing is an integral part of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States, and routine testing is one of the most important strategies recommended for reducing the spread of HIV and improving the health outcomes for those already infected.^(5,8) State and local education agencies and schools are essential partners in this effort. In particular, schools have a critical role to play in facilitating delivery of HIV and STD prevention for adolescents.^(9, 10) State and local data on HIV and STD testing will help agencies examine local trends in testing behaviors, identify disparities in testing, and determine whether high risk youth are being tested.^(9,10) In 2019, 9% of high school students nationwide had ever tested for HIV.⁽¹¹⁾ The percentage of high school students who have ever been tested for HIV did not change from 2005–2011 (12%–13%), but significantly decreased from 2011–2019 (13%–9%).⁽¹¹⁾ In 2019, 9% of high school students had been tested for an STD during the 12 months before the survey.⁽¹¹⁾

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Sexual Identity

QUESTION(S):

64. During your life, with whom have you had sexual contact?
65. Which of the following best describes you?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure sexual identity and sex of sexual partners. Measuring these two constructs enables identification of youth who are sexual minorities. Sexual minority refers to individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or some other non-heterosexual identity, as well as those who have sexual contact with persons of the same or both sexes. Sexual minority youth are a diverse population, representing all races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and all parts of the country. While many sexual minority youth cope with the transition from childhood to adulthood successfully and become healthy and productive adults, others struggle as a result of challenges such as stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, social rejection, and violence.⁽¹⁾ YRBS data support this reality, finding that sexual minority youth, both by sexual identity and sex of sexual contacts, have higher rates of violence victimization than youth who identify as heterosexual or only report opposite sex sexual contacts.⁽²⁾ Sexual minority youth also face well-documented health disparities. For example, young gay and bisexual males have disproportionately high rates of HIV and syphilis,^(3,4) adolescent lesbian and bisexual females are more likely to have ever been pregnant,⁽⁵⁾ and sexual minority youth are at increased risk of suicidality compared to their heterosexual peers.⁽²⁾ Increasing attention has been given to the HIV prevention needs of young men who have sex with other men (YMSM), as they are more likely than males who only report sexual contact with females to engage in sexual risk-taking behaviors, such as forgoing condoms and having more than four lifetime sexual partners.⁽⁶⁾ Additionally, HIV infection rates among YMSM are disproportionately high.⁽⁷⁾ Data on the sexual minority status of young people are critical for continuing to demonstrate the disproportionate rates at which sexual minority students experience many health risks compared to sexual majority students and for developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and programs designed to mitigate these disparities. In 2019, 84% of high school students nationwide identified as heterosexual, 3% identified as gay or lesbian, 9% identified as bisexual, and 5% responded not sure about their sexual identity.⁽⁸⁾ Also in 2019, 45% of high school students nationwide had had sexual contact with only the opposite sex, 2% had had sexual contact with only the same sex, 5% had had sexual contact with both sexes, and 48% had had no sexual contact.⁽⁸⁾

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Dietary Behaviors

QUESTION(S):

68. During the past 7 days, how many times did you drink 100% fruit juices such as orange juice, apple juice, or grape juice? (Do not count punch, Kool-Aid, sports drinks, or other fruit-flavored drinks.)
69. During the past 7 days, how many times did you eat fruit? (Do not count fruit juice.)
70. During the past 7 days, how many times did you eat green salad?
71. During the past 7 days, how many times did you eat potatoes? (Do not count french fries, fried potatoes, or potato chips.)
72. During the past 7 days, how many times did you eat carrots?
73. During the past 7 days, how many times did you eat other vegetables? (Do not count green salad, potatoes, or carrots.)
74. During the past 7 days, how many times per day did you usually drink a can, bottle, or glass of soda or pop, such as Coke, Pepsi, or Sprite? (Do not count diet soda or diet pop.)
75. During the past 7 days, how many glasses of milk did you drink? (Count the milk you drank in a glass or cup, from a carton, or with cereal. Count the half pint of milk served at school as equal to one glass.)
76. During the past 7 days, on how many days did you eat breakfast?

RATIONALE:

These questions measure dietary behaviors, including consumption of fruits, vegetables, beverages, and breakfast. The fruit and vegetable questions are similar to questions asked of adults on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2009 survey questionnaire.⁽¹⁾ Fruits and vegetables are good sources of complex carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and other substances that are important for good health.⁽²⁾ There is probable evidence to suggest that dietary patterns with higher intakes of fruits and vegetables are associated with a decreased risk for some types of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and stroke.^(2,3) Although data are limited, an increased intake of fruits and vegetables appears to be associated with a decreased risk of being overweight.^(2,4) However, most youth do not meet the recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption.⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾ In 2019, during the 7 days before the survey, 42% of high school students nationwide had eaten fruit or drunk 100% fruit juice less than one time per day and 41% of students had eaten vegetables less than one time per day.⁽⁸⁾

Although total sugar-sweetened beverage consumption has significantly decreased during the last

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decade, mainly due to the decrease in regular soda intake, the calorie intake from sugar-sweetened beverages remain high.⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, sugar-sweetened beverages are a primary source of added sugars in the diet of U.S. children,⁽¹⁰⁾ and contribute on average 132 kcal/day.⁽⁹⁾ Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with a less healthy diet,⁽¹¹⁾ increased risk of dental decay⁽¹²⁾ and obesity among children,⁽¹³⁾ and the development of metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes.⁽¹⁴⁾ Nationwide in 2019, 15% of high school students had drunk a can, bottle, or glass of soda or pop (not counting diet soda or diet pop) one or more times per day during the 7 days before the survey.⁽⁸⁾ The percentage of students who drank soda or pop one or more times per day decreased significantly during 2009–2019 (29%–15%).⁽⁸⁾

Milk is an important source of many nutrients, including calcium.⁽²⁾ There is evidence that intake of milk and milk products is associated with bone health in children and adolescents and with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes and with lower blood pressure in adults.⁽²⁾ Although the recommended intake of milk and milk products is 3 cups per day for adolescents, most adolescents consume far less.^(2,6) In 2019, 7% of high school students nationwide had drunk three or more glasses of milk per day.⁽¹⁵⁾ The percentage of students who drank three or more glasses of milk decreased significantly during 1999–2011 (18%–15%) and then further decreased during 2011–2019 (15%–7%).⁽¹⁵⁾

Eating breakfast is associated with weight loss and weight loss maintenance,⁽²⁾ improved nutrient intake,⁽²⁾ and better cognitive function, academic performance, school attendance rates, psychosocial function, and mood.⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁹⁾ In 2019, 17% of high school students nationwide did not eat breakfast on all 7 days before the survey.⁽⁸⁾ The percentage of students who did not eat breakfast on all 7 days increased significantly during 2011–2019 (13%–17%).⁽⁸⁾

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Physical Activity

QUESTION(S):

77. During the past 7 days, on how many days were you physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day? (Add up all the time you spent in any kind of physical activity that increased your heart rate and made you breathe hard some of the time.)
78. On an average school day, how many hours do you spend in front of a TV, computer, smart phone, or other electronic device watching shows or videos, playing games, accessing the Internet, or using social media (also called “screen time”)? (Do not count time spent doing schoolwork.)
79. In an average week when you are in school, on how many days do you go to physical education (PE) classes?
80. During the past 12 months, on how many sports teams did you play? (Count any teams run by your school or community groups.)

RATIONALE:

These questions measure participation in physical activity and team sports and attendance in physical education classes. These questions also examine use of screen time including the use of a TV, computer, smart phone, or other electronic device to watch shows or videos, play games, access the Internet, or use social media. Participation in regular physical activity among young people can help build and maintain healthy bones and muscles, maintain body weight and reduce body fat, reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and promote psychological well-being.⁽¹⁾ Over time, regular physical activity decreases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, some types of cancer, and premature death.⁽¹⁾ In 2018, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommended that children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.⁽²⁾ In 2019, 23% of high school students were physically active doing any kind of physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time for a total of at least 60 minutes per day on each of the 7 days before the survey.⁽³⁾

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a mid-course report on the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*.⁽⁴⁾ This report focused on strategies to increase physical activity among youth. The report concluded that school-based settings had the strongest evidence and multi-component physical activity programs, including physical education, had the most promise for increasing physical activity. These strategies were reiterated in the 2018 *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, 2nd edition.⁽²⁾ In 2013, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released *Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School*.⁽⁵⁾ This report also stressed the importance of a comprehensive, multi-component, whole school approach to physical activity in schools. CDC and many other federal and national partners are promoting Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs (CSPAP) to create school environments that offer many opportunities for students to be physically active

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throughout the school day.⁽⁶⁾ A CSPAP includes strong coordination across five components: physical education, physical activity during school, physical activity before and after school, staff involvement, and family and community engagement. Physical education is the cornerstone of CSPAP with research showing that school physical education classes can increase adolescent participation in physical activity^(7–13) and help high school students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to engage in lifelong physical activity.^(4,14,15) In 2019, 26% of high school students nationwide went to physical education classes on all 5 days in an average week when they were in school.⁽³⁾

Evidence shows an association between higher levels of screen time and a variety of health risks for youth, including adiposity, unhealthy diet, and depressive symptoms.^(16–22) There is also evidence that increased screen time is associated with irritability, low cognitive and socioemotional development, and poor educational performance.⁽¹⁷⁾ Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 46% of students played video or computer games or used a computer for something that was not school work for 3 or more hours per day on an average school day and 20% watched television 3 or more hours per day on an average school day.⁽²³⁾ Time spent in screen use might take time away from other beneficial activities of the day including physical activity and sleep.^(24,25)

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Concussion

QUESTION(S):

81. During the past 12 months, how many times did you have a concussion from playing a sport or being physically active?

RATIONALE:

This question measures the prevalence of self-reported concussions from playing sports or being physically active. Compared with older athletes, high school athletes have shown increased susceptibility to concussions and longer recovery times,⁽¹⁾ making concussions among youths playing a sport or being physically active an area of concern. Also of concern are the short-term and long-term sequelae of concussions, which can include cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes.⁽¹⁾ In 2013, the Institute of Medicine (now National Academy of Sciences) produced a report entitled *Sports Related Concussions in Youth: Improving the Science, Changing the Culture* that challenged CDC to improve the surveillance of sports-related concussions among youth.⁽¹⁾ The report identified a number of gaps in current surveillance efforts. Specifically, current surveillance systems only captured concussions experienced in organized, school-based sports at the high school or college level, or only captured sports-related concussions seen in emergency departments.⁽¹⁾ As a result, there were no comprehensive national incidence estimates of sports- and recreation-related concussions experienced by youth.

States may be particularly interested in more comprehensive estimates of sports- and recreation-related concussions because legislation related to sports concussions was passed in all 50 states within the past 10-12 years. This legislation, commonly referred to as “Return to Play” laws, typically have three core components: concussion education for athletes, parents, and coaches; restrictions on returning to play on the same day of a suspected concussion; and medical clearance prior to returning to play after a concussion. Being able to monitor the incidence of sports- and recreation-related concussions at the state level could allow states to monitor the effects of this legislation as well as the impact of prevention efforts. The 2021 survey will be the third administration of the question and may provide the first opportunity to observe a trend in youth sports/recreation-related concussions.

Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 15% of students experienced a sports- or physical activity-related concussion during the 12 months before the survey.⁽²⁾

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Oral Health

QUESTION(S):

84. When was the last time you saw a dentist for a check-up, exam, teeth cleaning, or other dental work?

RATIONALE:

This question measures the prevalence of use of oral health care. YRBS is the only surveillance data source to monitor use of oral health care among high school students at the national, state, and local levels. Past-year dental visit among high school students from YRBS is a key indicator included in the National Oral Health Surveillance System.⁽¹⁾

Despite improvements in oral health status in the United States, disparities remain in some population groups as classified by sex, income, age, and race/ethnicity.^(2,3) Oral diseases and conditions can occur throughout the life span.^(2,3) Nearly every American has experienced the most common oral disease, dental caries.^(2,3) Among adolescents aged 12–19 years more than half experienced dental caries in permanent teeth and 1 in 6 had untreated tooth decay in 2011–2016.⁽⁴⁾

Oral health is related to general health. Oral diseases may be associated with other diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and adverse pregnancy outcomes.⁽²⁾ General health risk factors, such as tobacco use and poor dietary behaviors, are also major risk factors for oral diseases.⁽²⁾ Regular access to oral health care is important to prevention and early detection and control of oral diseases. Dental settings also offer a unique venue to integrate oral health into coordinated prevention and control of chronic diseases.^(2,4) According to 2019 YRBS data, nationwide, 76% of students saw a dentist for a check-up, teeth cleaning, or other dental work during the 12 months before the survey.⁽⁵⁾ Practicing healthy behaviors (e.g., not using tobacco, not using illegal substances, not drinking soda) was associated with receiving dental care in the past year among high school students.⁽⁶⁾

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Sleep

QUESTION(S):

86. On an average school night, how many hours of sleep do you get?

RATIONALE:

This question measures the amount of sleep students get on an average school night. Sleep is necessary for physical and mental health and is particularly important during adolescence, a phase of rapid biologic growth and development.⁽¹⁾ In 2015, nearly three quarters of high school students reported getting less than the recommended amount of sleep on school nights.⁽²⁾ Lack of adequate sleep among adolescents is associated with daytime sleepiness,^(3,4) falling asleep during class,⁽⁵⁾ general inattentiveness,⁽⁵⁾ classroom behavioral problems,⁽⁵⁾ drowsy driving,^(1,3) depressed mood,^(1,3,6) headaches,⁽⁶⁾ and poor school performance.⁽⁷⁾ Evidence tying insufficient sleep to poor health outcomes such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes is also growing.^(8–10)

Analysis of data from the national YRBS has shown that insufficient sleep is associated with higher odds of current use of cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol; current sexual activity; seriously considering attempting suicide; feeling sad or hopeless; physical fighting; physical inactivity; obesity; engaging in injury-related risk behaviors; and engaging in unhealthy weight-control behaviors.^(11–14)

In 2016, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommended that children aged 6–12 years should regularly sleep 9–12 hours per 24 hours and teens aged 13–18 years should sleep 8–10 hours per 24 hours.⁽¹⁵⁾ Among high school students nationwide in 2019, 22% of students got 8 or more hours of sleep on an average school night.⁽¹⁶⁾ The percentage of students getting 8 or more hours of sleep did not change significantly during 2007–2013 (31%–32%) and then decreased significantly during 2013–2019 (32%–22%).⁽¹⁶⁾

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Homelessness

QUESTION(S):

87. During the past 30 days, where did you usually sleep?

RATIONALE:

This question measures the percentage of students self-identifying as experiencing homelessness under the definition of homelessness that applies to all public schools under the McKinney-Vento Act.⁽¹⁾ The Act requires every local education agency (LEA) in the United States to identify homeless youth in the LEA, and to collect and provide data to the state regarding the number of homeless students in the LEA. Schools use multiple strategies to identify students experiencing homelessness, but even the most robust strategies miss a large segment of the homeless population, because many parents and students strive to keep their housing situation private, fearing stigma, judgment, child welfare or law enforcement involvement, or other repercussions.

When schools do not identify students experiencing homelessness, those students do not receive critical services available to them under the McKinney-Vento Act, such as school meals, school health and mental health services, access to transportation, and the ability to remain stable in one school. In 2019, 27 states and 7 LEAs included this question about housing status on their state or local YRBS. Including this question on the YRBS has helped states and LEAs generate a more accurate estimate of the extent of student homelessness, giving district administrators the impetus to evaluate and improve their methods for identifying homeless students.

In addition to helping jurisdictions generate a more accurate estimate of the extent of student homelessness, the data resulting from this question has helped illuminate the health risks associated with homelessness. For example, compared to their housed peers, high school students experiencing homelessness are significantly more likely to attempt suicide, to be forced to have sexual intercourse, and to use alcohol and other drugs, and they are less likely to eat breakfast and get adequate sleep.⁽²⁾ This information highlights the importance of implementing interventions to mitigate those risks. By revealing the supports needed for students experiencing homelessness, YRBS data can help schools increase high school graduation rates of these students, which can help prevent continued homelessness into their young adulthood.⁽³⁾

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