



## Press Release

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### **Despite Improvements, Many High School Students Still Engaging in Risky Health Behaviors**

Although significant improvements have occurred over the past decade in various health-related behaviors among high school students, many high school students continue to engage in a variety of behaviors that put them at risk for injury and disease, according to the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Too many young people still engage in activities that place them at risk for serious injury, sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV infection, and chronic disease such as heart disease and cancer. We need to continue to provide them with the information and skills that can help them make the right choices today so that they can live a long and healthy life,” said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding.

However, during the past 12 years, the YRBSS has detected improvements in risk behaviors related to sexual activity, injuries and violence, and tobacco and alcohol use.

For example, the percentage of high school students who reported ever having sexual intercourse was 47 percent in 2003 compared to 54 percent in 1991. There was also a decrease in the number of high school students who reported having had four or more sex partners – 14 percent in 2003 compared to 19 percent in 1991. And the percentage of sexually active students who used a condom during last sexual intercourse increased from 46 percent in 1991 to 63 percent in 2003.

Behaviors related to injuries and violence that have improved since 1991 include:

- The percentage of high school students who had been in a physical fight dropped to 33 percent in 2003 from 43 percent in 1991 ;
- The percentage of high school students who rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol decreased to 30 percent in 2003 from 40 percent in 1991.

Behaviors associated with tobacco and alcohol use that have improved include:

- The percentage of high school students who reported current cigarette smoking – which had increased from 28 percent in 1991 to 36 percent in 1997 – fell to 22 percent in 2003;
- The percentage of high school students who had ever drunk alcohol dropped to 75 percent in 2003 compared to 82 percent in 1991.

“These trends show we are making progress in reaching our youth about positive health choices. A coordinated school health program combined with supportive community policies and programs are essential tools for addressing many of the health issues that affect teenagers today,” said Dr. George Mensah, acting director of CDC’s National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

The YRBSS is conducted every two years to scientifically-selected samples of high school students throughout the United States. It monitors health-risk behaviors that lead to unintentional injuries; violence; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually-transmitted

diseases and unintended pregnancy; and dietary behaviors and physical inactivity that contribute to overweight. The report includes national data as well as data for 32 states and 18 large cities.

For the 2003 national survey, 15,214 questionnaires were completed by students in the 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Parental permission was obtained, student participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. States and cities could modify the questionnaire to meet their needs.

The YRBSS is one of three HHS-sponsored surveys that provide data on tobacco and other substance use among youth. The others are the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and a primary source of statistics on illicit drug use among Americans age 12 and over ([www.oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda.htm](http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda.htm)) and the Monitoring the Future (MTF) Study funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (<http://monitoringthefuture.org>). MTF tracks tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use and attitudes toward drugs among students in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

The 2003 YRBSS is available at [www.cdc.gov/yrbss](http://www.cdc.gov/yrbss) or [www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth).

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