



2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey

Data Brief: Mental Health

A high number of Washington teens reported feeling sad or hopeless, and many reported having suicidal thoughts or attempting suicide. According to 2017 vital statistics data from the Department of Health, suicide was the leading cause of death for Washington teens 15 to 19 years of age, but it is preventable.

Caring adults, including parents, school staff, coaches, and faith leaders, can all support youth. Educating caring adults and communities in recognizing mental health conditions, increasing social connectedness, improving access to care, and teaching youth resiliency skills will expand systems of support that can help prevent suicide.

At least one in three youth in all grades report feeling sad or hopeless for at least two weeks in the past year.

For all grades, the prevalence of students who felt sad or hopeless almost every day during a two week period in the past year has risen steadily since 2008. From 2008 to 2018, students who experienced a two-week episode where they felt sad or hopeless, stopping their usual activities, in the past year increased:

- 8th grade – up from 24% to 32%
- 10th grade – up from 30% to 40%
- 12th grade – up from 29% to 41%

The number of teens reporting feeling nervous, anxious or on edge is also rising. About one in three 10th and 12th graders report feeling nervous, anxious, on edge in the past two weeks, and not being able to stop worrying.

- From 2016 to 2018, the percentage experiencing these feelings increased for all grades:
 - 8th grade (22% to 26%)
 - 10th grade (31% to 33%)
 - 12th grade (33% to 35%)

About one in 10 Washington high school students report having attempted suicide in the past year, while about one in 5 reported seriously considering suicide.

Rates of reported suicide attempts were steady for grades 10 and 12 between 2016 and 2018. In 2018:

- 10 percent of 8th graders (*about 8,200 students in public schools*)
- 10 percent of 10th graders (*about 8,400 students in public schools*)
- 9 percent of 12th graders (*about 8,100 students in public schools*)

This means that in a typical-sized high school classroom (about 29 students), chances are two or three students have attempted suicide in the past year.

Female students and students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual have reported higher rates of considering, making a plan, and attempting suicide. Among 10th graders in 2018:

- More girls than boys report they had thought about (28%), made a plan (22%), and attempted suicide (12%) in the past year than boys (18%, 14%, and 8%, respectively). However, Washington

State vital statistics data shows more teenage boys die from suicide than girls, often due to using more lethal means of suicide.

- Among schools that administered the optional survey questions, relative to their straight peers, students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual report more than double the rates of considering and attempting suicide (49% vs. 19% and 22% vs. 7%, respectively). Note that because not all schools administered this question, these results may not be representative of students across Washington State.
- High rates of suicide attempts are also reported among students who identify as non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaskan Native (18%) and students who identify as Hispanic (13%).

Despite high rates of psychological distress, adult support can help. However, only half of students report having adult support when experiencing challenges and remain hopeful about their future.

- In 2018, about half of students in 8th grade (50%), 10th grade (49%) and 12th grade (53%) reported that they have adults to turn to if they feel sad or suicidal.
- Friends/peers, parents/guardians, and siblings/cousins are the most common people 10th graders say they turn to when they feel sad or hopeless.
- HYS 2018 introduced the modified Children's Hope Scale, which measures the ability to initiate and sustain action towards goals and the ability to find a way to carry out goals. In 2018, about half of 8th, 10th and 12th graders (52%, 47%, and 51%, respectively), report being highly hopeful about their future.
- Students feeling sad or hopeless reported high hope less frequently than their peers. Of these students, only about 29% of 8th graders, 30% 10th graders, and 35% of 12th graders reported high hope.
- Similarly, students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual and students of color were less likely to report adult support and were less likely to be highly hopeful for their future than were their peers.

Efforts to address bullying may be starting to pay off, but too many students, particularly those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, are still reporting being bullied. Among 10th graders in 2018:

- Almost one in 5 students (19%) reported being bullied in the last 30 days.
- More female than male students reported being bullied in the past month (22% vs. 16%).
- Relative to their straight peers, more 10th grade students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual reported experiencing bullying in the past month (29% vs. 16%).
- Relative to their non-Hispanic white peers, students who identify as non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native reported higher rates of being bullied (32% vs. 21%).

State, local, community and school efforts are crucial for supporting youth mental health. See the Mental Health Resource Guide at <http://www.askhys.net/Home/Press>.

In fall 2018, over 230,000 students participated in the Healthy Youth Survey. Over 900 schools administered the survey, representing all 39 Washington counties and 228 school districts.

For more Healthy Youth Survey fact sheets and reports, visit www.AskHYS.net.

Help is available 24/7 from the [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-TALK. Or, you can text "HEAL" to 741741 to reach a trained [Crisis Text Line](#) counselor.