



HOW CAN THE DATA BE USED? Healthy Youth Survey 2020

This document describes the different ways that Healthy Youth Survey data can be used. It explains why the survey data are valid, how to identify changes among students over time, and how to compare your students' results to students statewide.

Schools can use Health Youth Survey (HYS) results to:

- Learn the **prevalence** of health-related behaviors among students.
- Understand the **school climate**.
- Contribute to the **School Improvement Planning** process.
- Help inform other **needs assessments**.
- Help **justify** new school programs, projects or staffing.
- Assist with **evaluating or improving** existing school programs or projects.
- Provide information for writing **grant** applications.

Health-Related Behaviors and Academic Achievement

There is mounting evidence supporting the concept that reducing students' health-risk behaviors can have a positive impact on their academic performance. The HYS measures a number of health-related issues such as substance use, poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, asthma, depression, violence, and safety. Any of these issues can distract students from school. Survey results may help identify areas where students need help so that they can be successful at school.

Understanding Your School Climate

School climate impacts students' daily experience, including their experiences before, during, and after school. The HYS has a number of questions on school climate including school safety, bullying, harassment, weapon carrying, substance use at school, skipping school, school health services, and school risk and protective factors. Results can be used to help create safe and welcoming schools that foster a positive school climate and higher academic achievement and can be used to address issues that are creating unwelcoming or unsafe schools that can create barriers to student success.

Planning and Evaluation Processes

The HYS data can be very useful in the planning process including the School Improvement Planning process (SIP). Survey results can be easily plugged into objectives to make them measurable.

The HYS data can also be used for a variety of needs assessments. School building results can be compared over time. These comparisons can point out areas where extra efforts may need to be put in place. In a similar way, these data can be used to improve existing programs and to justify the creation of new programs.

Grant Writing

Writing a successful grant application can be a complicated process, but HYS data can be useful in demonstrating need and developing a good case for support. HYS data can be used to describe your school population. There are also numerous additional possibilities for using your HYS data: your data may show that your school or district has higher or lower numbers than the state and needs help in a specific area; problematic behaviors at your school or district have been increasing over time and you need special attention to improve the situation; or your school or district has been improving and you want to communicate that you need to continue a successful program.

Even if you have a good “case” and a good project or plan, grant reviewers often expect objectives with outcomes that describe what you are doing, who you are targeting, and what you are planning to achieve. HYS data are easy to use when creating these measurable objectives, because most of the questions are asked every two years, the methods are easily described, and the results are considered valid (with proper administration procedures and good participation).

When setting objectives, be sure to consider the impact that the grant will actually have. Be careful not to overestimate the amount of change that you will see in two years at the school level, especially if you are only reaching a small or specific group of students.

How do I know my school’s data are valid?

The HYS questions come from standardized instruments that have been used over multiple years. New HYS questions are field tested with youth to make sure they understand the questions correctly. Research shows that surveys like the HYS can give valid results if youth are given a safe and confidential environment to take the survey.

To determine if your school results are valid, you need to think about how the survey was administered and who took the survey at your school. The four important things to consider are:

1. Were the administration procedures followed so that your students felt safe that their answers were confidential?
2. Did your teaching faculty and school staff take the survey seriously and did they encourage the students to take the survey seriously?
3. Was the survey administered during a time when certain groups of students were missing? (i.e., were honor students attending a college fair, or was the football team dismissed early for an away game?)
4. Did most of the students in the surveyed grade take the survey—at least 70%?

If administration procedures were not followed, if groups of students were missing, or if there was a low participation rate, then your survey results might not represent the students in your school and you should use caution when interpreting the results.

If administration procedures were followed, groups of students were not missing, and you had a good participation rate then you should feel confident that your results are representative of your school.

What do confidence intervals (the plus or minus) mean?

The HYS results include a (\pm) number after each item estimate—this number is a confidence interval (CI). It is unlikely that the point estimate (%) reported for each question is *exactly* the same as the “true” value for all your students. The 95% CI describes this uncertainty. If there is not bias in the data, then there is a 95% chance that the CI will include the true value.

For example, suppose that the 8th grader cigarette smoking is reported as:

Smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days. 6.6% (\pm 0.7%) ← *Confidence interval*

So in this example, we are confident that 8th grade cigarette smoking was somewhere between 5.9% and 7.3% ($6.6 - 0.7 = 5.9$ and $6.6 + 0.7 = 7.3$).

Results based on small numbers of students answering a question are unstable – that is, they could easily change with the absence from school of only a couple of students. This is especially the case when only a few students choose a particular answer option. Also, in this situation, the reported 95% CI might be too narrow. Thus, use caution if fewer than 30 students answered a question and fewer than 5 students selected a given response option. *For example, if 20 students answered a question and of those 20 only 3 students answered “Yes”, the estimate is unreliable.* The CI does not take into account the participation rate – in other words, a low participation rate can create bias which will not be reflected in the CI.

How do I determine changes over time or compare my students to the state?

Sometimes people look at change over time or compare two groups. We provide an excel tool that you can use to determine if your local result is significantly different from the state result or if there has been a significant change from one year to the next in your local area (that there is a less than 5% probability that the difference occurred by chance). This tool is online at: www.AskHYS.net/Training and <http://www.doh.wa.gov/DataandStatisticalReports/HealthBehaviors/HealthyYouthSurvey>

For more information on statistical issues, go to:

- DOH web site: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/DataandStatisticalReports/HealthBehaviors/HealthyYouthSurvey> and look for “Technical Notes”
- AskHYS.net web site: www.AskHYS.net/Training and look for “Analysis Manual” and materials from past in-person and webinar trainings.