

Trends in the West Virginia Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017

West Virginia high school students' risk-taking behaviors



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The results of the 2017 West Virginia Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), conducted in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have many stories to tell about our high school students' life experiences. The survey monitors six types of health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and adults. We look here at four of those categories: injury and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, and sexual behaviors. Behaviors related to wellness, especially dietary behaviors and physical activity, are reported separately.¹ The survey results presented here reveal how risk behaviors have changed over time and how they are reflected in the lives of students at various academic achievement levels.

The 2017 YRBS was completed by 1,563 students in randomly selected classrooms within 35 randomly selected public high schools in West Virginia during the spring of 2017. The school response rate was 100% and the student response rate was 78%. Students completed an anonymous, 91-item questionnaire. Survey procedures protected the privacy of students by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation.

For detailed reports based on this survey produced by the CDC and the West Virginia Department of Education, visit wvde.us/data-management-information-systems/data-analysis-research-and-program-evaluation/ and click on the "CDC youth risk behavior surveillance" menu button.

Risk-taking behaviors over time

The West Virginia Department of Education has been conducting the high school version of the YRBS since 1993, which gives us a long view of risk-taking behaviors. Here are some of the notable trends.

Injury and violence trends

Only one behavior worsened related to injury and violence in the past 25 years:

Did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	4% (1993)	7% (2017)
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And **a few behaviors remained much the same:**

Being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property	8% (1993)	7% (2017)
Feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks	30% (1999)	32% (2017)

¹ See Hammer, P. C. (2018). West Virginia high school students' wellness behaviors: Trends in the West Virginia High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017. Charleston, WV: West Virginia Department of Education: Office of Data Management and Information Systems. Available at wvde.us/data-management-information-systems/data-analysis-research-and-program-evaluation/

But **many behaviors improved**. The percentages of W.Va. high school students 25 years ago and in 2017 who reported injury- and violence-risk behaviors were as follows:

Rarely or never wore a seat belt	34% (1993)	9% (2017)
Recently rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol	39% (1993)	13% (2017)
Recently carried a weapon on school property	14% (1993)	5% (2017)
Were in a physical fight on school property in the past year	17% (1993)	6% (2017)
Made a plan in the past year about how they would attempt suicide	20% (1993)	15% (2017)

Drunk driving versus driving while texting

In 2017 among students who had driven a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey,

- 5% drove when they had been drinking alcohol
- 34% texted or e-mailed while driving

Note: Driving a vehicle while using a cell phone is at least as dangerous—some studies say more dangerous—compared with driving while intoxicated! *

* See Leung, S., Croft, R.J., Jackson, M.L., Howard, M.E., & McKenzie, R.J. (2012). A comparison of the effect of mobile phone use and alcohol consumption on driving simulation performance. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 13(6), 566-74; and Strayer, D.L., Drews, F.A., & Crouch, D.J. (2006). A comparison of the cell phone driver and the drunk driver. *Human Factors*, 48(2), 381-91.

Tobacco use

Tobacco use has decreased steadily during the past 25 years among high school students in W.Va. as shown in the following percentages:

Ever tried cigarette smoking	77% (1993)	40% (2017)
Smoked cigarettes frequently (on 20 or more days during the past 30 days)	20% (1993)	6% (2017)

Vaping: Has it peaked?

In the two years we have been asking W.Va. high school students if they used electronic vapor products (2015 to 2017) they reported the following:

Ever used an electronic vapor product	49% (2015)	44% (2017)
Used an electronic vapor product at least once in the 30 days leading up to the survey	31% (2015)	14% (2017)

This is a trend to keep an eye on in the coming years.

Alcohol and other drug use

Alcohol use has declined among W.Va. high school students in the past 25 years as shown in the following percentages:

Ever drank alcohol	83% (1993)	64% (2017)
Had at least one drink of alcohol, on at least one day during the 30 days before the survey	53% (1993)	28% (2017)

Marijuana use trended up from 1993 - 1999, **then trended back down** through the years.

Ever used marijuana	34% (1993)	48% (1999)	35% (2017)
Used marijuana one or more times during the 30 days before the survey	18% (1993)	29% (1999)	18% (2017)

Students used **cocaine, heroin** and **injected illegal drugs at about the same relatively low levels** over time:

Ever used cocaine (any form)	5% (1993)	6% (2017)
Ever used heroin	3% (1999)	3% (2017)
Ever injected any illegal drug	4% (1995)	3% (2017)

Students used **methamphetamines** and **inhalants at much lower levels** in 2017 than in previous years:

Ever used methamphetamines	14% (1999)	5% (2017)
Ever used inhalants	28% (1995)	7% (2017)

About a quarter of W.Va. high school students **were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property in both time periods**

26% (1993) 24% (2017)

Sexual behaviors

Sexual activity among W.Va. high school students has been steadily trending downward and in 2017 **was considerably lower** than among high school students 25 years earlier:

Ever had sexual intercourse	63% (1993)	46% (2017)
Had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years	12% (1993)	4% (2017)
Had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life	22% (1993)	12% (2017)
Were currently sexually active	46% (1993)	36% (2017)

Among sexually active students, **use of condoms** is the same as 25 years ago—about 50%. In 2017, 35% of sexually active students **used some other form of pregnancy prevention**. There has been little change in the percentage of students who **did not use any method to prevent pregnancy** during their last sexual intercourse—16% in 1993 and 14% in 2017.

Risk behaviors and level of academic achievement

In addition to reporting student behaviors over time, the YRBS also reports differences in risk-taking behaviors by level of academic performance. The following are the results from the high school student survey for 2017.

W.Va. students with lower achievement not only face greater risk of school failure than their higher achieving peers but also experienced greater risk of **injuries and violence** in the year before the survey:

Were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property	4% (A's)	7% (B's)	8% (C's)	15% (D's/F's)
Were in a physical fight on school property	3% (A's)	6% (B's)	11% (C's)	20% (D's/F's)
Experienced physical dating violence	7% (A's)	9% (B's)	8% (C's)	21% (D's/F's)
Were electronically bullied	17% (A's)	21% (B's)	22% (C's)	30% (D's/F's)
Attempted suicide one or more times	5% (A's)	9% (B's)	17% (C's)	24% (D's/F's)

As shown in the comparisons below, greater percentages of lower-achieving students engaged in risky behaviors— on at least one day during the 30 days leading up to the survey—with regard to **tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use**.

Cigarettes or cigars	10% (A's)	18% (B's)	33% (C's)	57% (D's/F's)
Smokeless tobacco	5% (A's)	13% (B's)	24% (C's)	37% (D's/F's)
Alcohol	23% (A's)	31% (B's)	38% (C's)	40% (D's/F's)
Binge drank alcohol	10% (A's)	16% (B's)	23% (C's)	26% (D's/F's)
Marijuana	12% (A's)	24% (B's)	25% (C's)	45% (D's/F's)

Lower-achieving students were more willing to try—at least once in their lives—**other illegal substances**.

Cocaine	3% (A's)	5% (B's)	13% (C's)	18% (D's/F's)
Inhalants	5% (A's)	7% (B's)	13% (C's)	12% (D's/F's)
Heroin	2% (A's)	3% (B's)	6% (C's)	13% (D's/F's)
Methamphetamines	2% (A's)	4% (B's)	11% (C's)	19% (D's/F's)
Ecstasy	2% (A's)	5% (B's)	8% (C's)	16% (D's/F's)
Prescription pain medicine (non-prescribed or not as prescribed)	7% (A's)	14% (B's)	20% (C's)	29% (D's/F's)

Finally, the pattern basically held for **sexual activity**, with the exception of students earning D's and F's, fewer of whom compared with students earning C's, reported current sexual activity or multiple partners.

Ever had sexual intercourse	38% (A's)	51% (B's)	60% (C's)	61% (D's/F's)
Were currently sexually active	28% (A's)	38% (B's)	41% (C's)	32% (D's/F's)
Had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life	7% (A's)	13% (B's)	21% (C's)	16% (D's/F's)

With regard to **use of birth control**, higher-achieving students reported taking more precautions than lower-achieving students before their most recent sexual intercourse. (Note, there were insufficient numbers of responses from students in the D's/F's category—fewer than 30—so percentages are not reported.)

Used condom	57% (A's)	51% (B's)	40% (C's)
Used some other form of pregnancy prevention	44% (A's)	33% (B's)	28% (C's)
Did not use any method to prevent pregnancy	9% (A's)	14% (B's)	22% (C's)

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