



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Developing Healthy Habits – Part 2

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2009

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[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

A recent CDC study found that too many high school students are engaging in behaviors that place them at immediate risk for serious health, education, and social problems.

Dr. Danice Eaton is a research scientist with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of developing healthy habits early in life. Welcome to the show, Danice.

[Dr. Eaton] Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Danice, we'd previously talked about habits and behaviors of high school students that link them to the leading causes of death among adults, but how about activities that have more immediate consequences?

[Dr. Eaton] Right. Too many high school students today are engaging in a variety of health risk behaviors. For example, we are seeing one in four high school students saying that they've ridden in a car with a driver who'd been drinking alcohol. Nearly one in three have been in a physical fight. Three out of four have drunk alcohol, and almost half of high school students have had sexual intercourse.

[Dr. Gaynes] Do these behaviors relate to gender, race, or ethnicity?

[Dr. Eaton] Yes. We do see some differences by gender. High school boys are most likely to have been in a physical fight, to use a variety of illicit drugs, and to have had sexual intercourse with four or more persons. On the other hand, girls are most likely to have seriously considered attempting suicide and to have drunk alcohol. We see racial-ethnic differences, as well. For example, binge drinking is most common among white students, risky sexual behaviors is most common among black students, and riding in a car with a driver who has been drinking alcohol is most common among Hispanic students.

[Dr. Gaynes] Has participation in these risky behaviors changed over time?

[Dr. Eaton] Yes. Participation in many of these risk behaviors has decreased over time. For example, since we first started monitoring these behaviors in 1991, we've seen overall decreases in rarely or never wearing a seatbelt, seriously considering attempting suicide, drinking alcohol, and in risky sexual behaviors.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some of the strategies that parents can use to help reduce these risky behaviors among high school students?

[Dr. Eaton] Well, youth need to develop skills and motivation to avoid risky behaviors. There are several things parents can do to facilitate this. Parents should talk with their teenagers about the dangers of drugs, drinking, smoking, and risky sexual behavior. They should also discuss with their teens the importance of choosing friends who do not act in dangerous or unhealthy ways. And parents should make a habit of knowing where their teen is and whether an adult is present.

[Dr. Gaynes] What can schools and teachers do?

[Dr. Eaton] Schools also play an important role. We know that when students feel connected to their school, they're less likely to engage in a variety of risk behaviors. Schools can promote school connectedness in many ways. For example, they can provide opportunities for students and their parents to be involved in planning school policies and activities. They can help students identify career and personal goals and map out the steps toward achieving them. And one simple thing that schools can do is to encourage all school staff to greet each student by name.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about adolescent health risk behaviors?

[Dr. Eaton] They can go to www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth, and that's all one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Danice. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Danice Eaton about the importance of developing healthy habits early in life.

Remember, communication and education, both at home and at school, are the keys to learning healthy behaviors that help insure our young people live longer, healthier lives.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.