



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Making Healthy Choices

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2007

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[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 documented what most parents already know: kids don't always make good choices. A national survey of high school students found that many teenagers engage in behaviors that put them at a high risk for getting sick or even dying. The questionnaire asked about everything from alcohol and tobacco use to sexual activity and dietary habits.

Dr. Howell Wechsler is the Director of CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health. He's joining us today to discuss the findings of the survey of young people in the United States. Welcome to the show, Howell.

[Dr. Wechsler] Thank you so much.

[Dr. Gaynes] Howell, how does CDC manage to collect information on such a wide variety of topics from teenagers from all over the country?

[Dr. Wechsler] Well, we work very closely with state and local education departments and, through them, we get into the schools, and we make sure that the questions are asked in a way so that the students know their answers will be confidential and anonymous. We survey over 14,000 students to get the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey results, and that is a representative picture of high school students across the nation.

[Dr. Gaynes] What's the importance of collecting these data?

[Dr. Wechsler] Well, it's critical for us to know how our kids are doing. It's critical for us to see whether there are changes over time, to know whether we're making progress, to whether the programs that we're implementing to help our children make healthy choices are indeed working. It's important for us to see whether there are different populations among the high school students that are more or less likely to engage in different risk behaviors, so we can target our resources — many, many different reasons to keep track of what are kids our doing.

[Dr. Gaynes] What were some of the major findings about the risky behaviors of U.S. teenagers?

[Dr. Wechsler] First, that we can't really be satisfied because there are just far too many of our children who are engaging in behaviors that could place their health at risk, either in the present or in the future. So, the large majority of our students are not eating enough fruits and vegetables, are not getting enough exercise. About half of our kids are drinking alcohol. About half of our

kids in high school have had sex, and still, despite all the information that's known, still, one out of five of our high school students are smoking cigarettes.

[Dr. Gaynes] Were there any findings that were particularly surprising or unexpected?

[Dr. Wechsler] Well, we think it's really important to look at the differences across students, say, by racial/ethnic groups. And what we see is each of the three major groups — our black students, our white students, our Hispanic students — each of them is at greater risk for some things and at less risk for other things. So, for example, our black students are much less likely than white and Hispanic students to smoke cigarettes and to use most of the illegal drugs. However, they're at greater risk for engaging in sexual risk behaviors and for watching too much television, while white students are much more likely than black and Hispanic students to smoke cigarettes, and our Hispanic students are more likely to attempt suicide and use drugs, such as cocaine.

[Dr. Gaynes] On the grass-roots level, how can parents and teachers use this information?

[Dr. Wechsler] Well, one of the first things to recognize is that our kids are doing better now on many, many of these risk behaviors than were kids in the 1990s, so we are making progress. And sometimes our kids have the wrong idea. They think, "Well, everybody's smoking. I might as well start 'cause everybody's smoking." And sometimes we just need to teach them that "Hey, it's too many kids who are smoking, but it's only one out of five. That means that only four of five kids are not smoking, so you really don't need to go along with the crowd because most of the crowd is not taking these risks with their health."

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

[Dr. Wechsler] At our website: www.cdc.gov/yrbs.

[Dr. Gaynes] Howell, thanks for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Wechsler] My pleasure.

[Dr. Gaynes] That's it for this week's show. Be sure and join us again next week. Until then, 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.