

Making a Difference in Our Youth

Our Vision

The biannual Youth Data Survey monitors current and longitudinal trends of priority risk behaviors that threaten the health and safety of young people. Data from the Youth Data Survey provides accurate and valid estimates of the prevalence of youth risk behaviors. This quantitative approach reflects the larger community goal of identifying assets that will prepare today's youth to become healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. Pairing this approach with our community vision, we will continue to develop proactive, youth-focused solutions. With our vision, these solutions will not only empower the youth of today but will lead to a vibrant economic workforce as we continue to move forward through the 21st century.



How Are We Doing?

The most recent Youth Data Survey (2009-2010) reveals promising results about the youth in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. Youth assets are increasing. They are pursuing those things that make them resilient and more likely to grow into confident, responsible, and healthy adults. Avoiding drugs and alcohol and increased participation in sports and community activities contribute to healthy lifestyles. We observe a decrease in youth risk behaviors around smoking tobacco, sexual activity, and violence. The past 12 years of survey data demonstrate that our local youth-serving organizations are greatly impacting our youth.

Alcohol Use

According to the Department of Health and Human Services 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 27.2 percent of youth aged 12 to 20 years reported drinking alcohol, and 18.1 percent reported binge drinking in the past month. At the local level, alcohol awareness programs directed at youth in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County aim to help decrease the number of youth participating in under-age drinking.

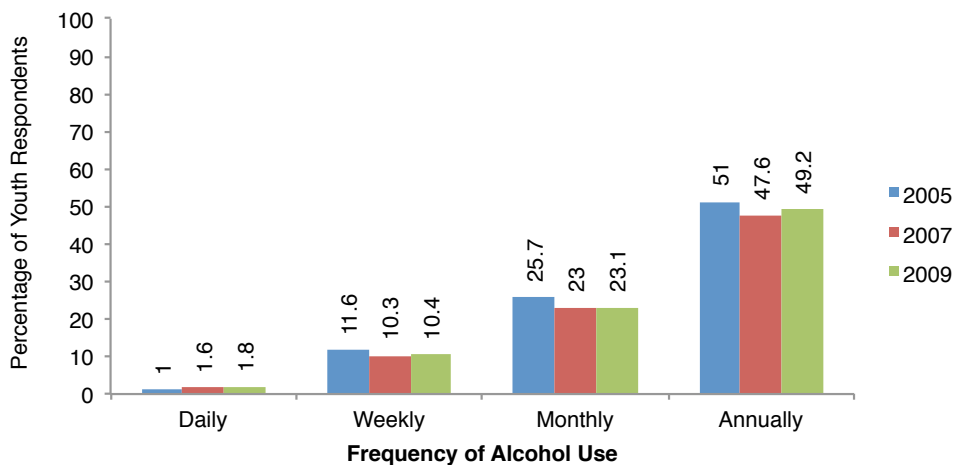
What does this measure?

Youth respondents were asked about the cumulative frequency of their alcohol use as well as the age at which they took their first drink.

How are we doing?

Locally, the monthly use of alcohol among youth in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County is considerably lower (23.1%) compared to the national monthly use (27.2%). These numbers slightly increased since 2007 in the frequency of alcohol use. The majority of youth who drink use alcohol on the weekends and at a friend's house, and more students drank beer than any other type of alcohol. Locally, the average age when youth reported they first try alcohol was 13.2 years in 2007 and 13.4 years in 2009. On a national level, the average age for when youth first try alcohol is 11 years for boys and 13 years for girls. This trend has remained consistent for the past 10 years.

Cumulative Frequency of Alcohol Use



*Data unavailable for 2005; question not included in the survey until 2007.

Youth Drug Use

According to the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 10 percent of the youth population 12 to 17 years had used illicit drugs in the past month. After a gradual decrease since before 2002, youth drug use increased in 2009 and now remains at the same level as recorded in 2005.

Nationally, marijuana was the most commonly used illicit drug over all youth age groups (7.3% of youth had used this drug in the past month). The next most common overall drugs were: psychotherapeutics (3.1%), inhalants (1.0%), hallucinogens (0.9%), and cocaine (0.3%).

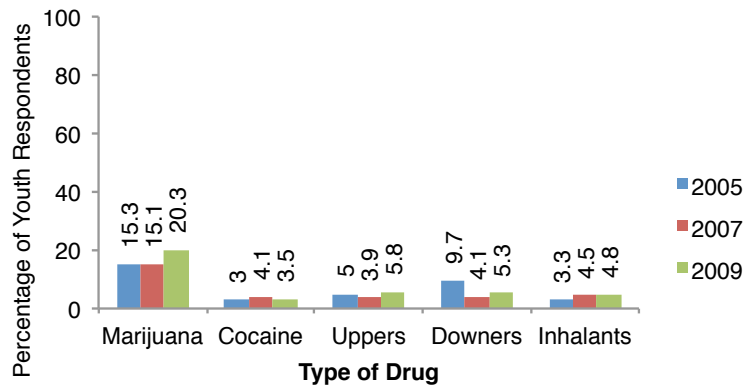
What does this measure?

Youth were asked whether they used drugs, the types of drugs they had used in the past year, and the cumulative frequency of drug use.

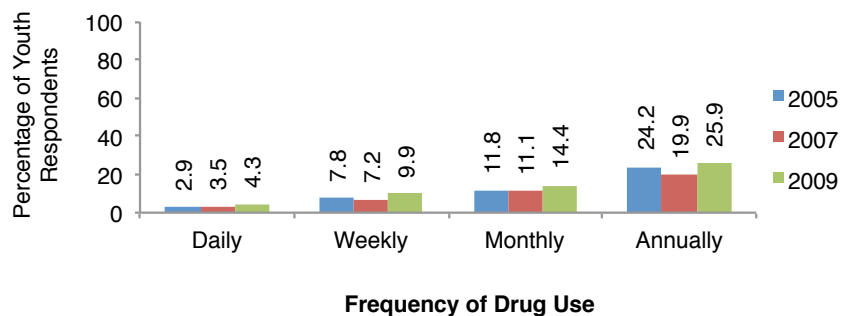
How are we doing?

Locally, the annual frequency of drug use has followed a decreasing trend from 1996 to 2005; however, since 2009 the annual frequency of drug use has begun to increase among all types of drugs, with the exception of cocaine. Marijuana use has significantly increased (5.2%) since 2007. Among 12th graders, there was a 9.9 percent increase in youth who felt marijuana was easy or very easy to obtain. The amount of cocaine use has decreased since 2007, while the use of uppers, downers, and inhalants has increased.

Annual Frequency of Drug Use by Type of Drug



Cumulative Frequency of Drug Use



Youth Health

The Centers for Disease Control reports that childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Nationwide, the prevalence of obesity among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years has increased from 5.0 percent in 1980 to 18.1 percent in 2008. Nationally, the percentage of children aged 10-17 who are overweight or obese (31.6%) is nearly identical to the percentage of youth with these health conditions in Virginia (31%).

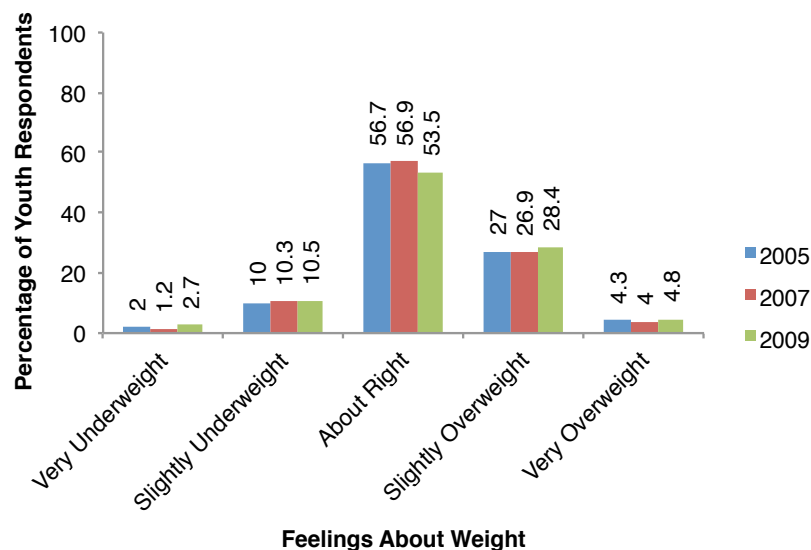
What does this measure?

Youth were asked to self-report weight and amount of physical activity in which they engaged regularly.

How are we doing?

Locally, 33.2 percent of youth self-reported being slightly or very overweight, an increase (2.2%) from the 2006 Healthy Community Council Report, while 13.2 percent of youth self-reported being slightly or very underweight, which was an increase (1.2%) from the 2006 Healthy Community Council Report. The overwhelming majority of youth (81.7%) reported that they exercise three or more days throughout the month; however, the data also showed that 18.3 percent of youth exercise two or fewer days a month. Harrisonburg and Rockingham County has developed a Healthy Lifestyle Coalition to examine what can be done to combat some of these alarming statistics.

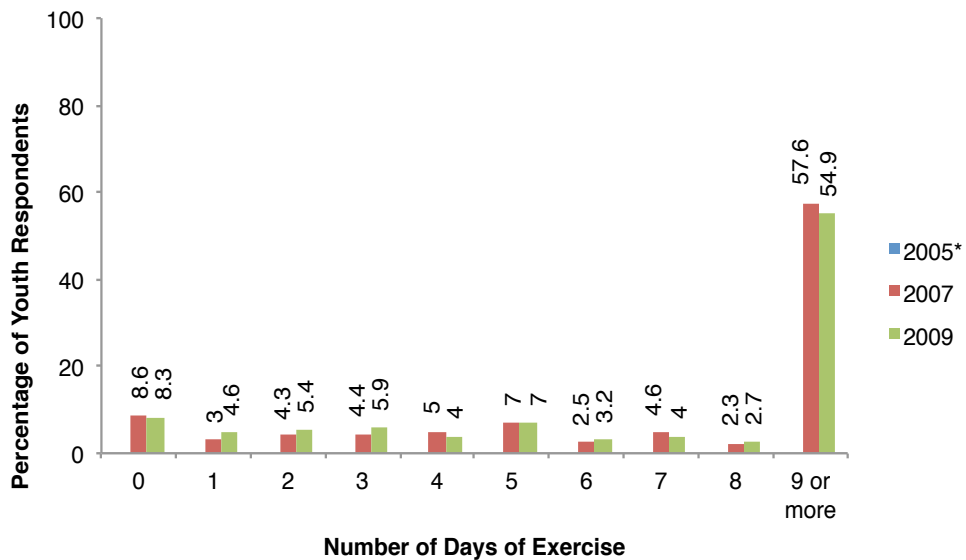
Self-Reported Feelings About Own Weight





These youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. These chronic diseases, once thought to affect only adults, are now prevalent among overweight children as young as 8 years. An overweight child now has a 70 percent chance of being overweight into adulthood.

Monthly Frequency of Exercise



Youth Sexuality

Outcomes from the state of Virginia demonstrate that state-wide teenage pregnancy rates have decreased overall from 2008 to 2009. Locally, the number of teen pregnancies among both younger and older teenagers also decreased from 2008 to 2009.

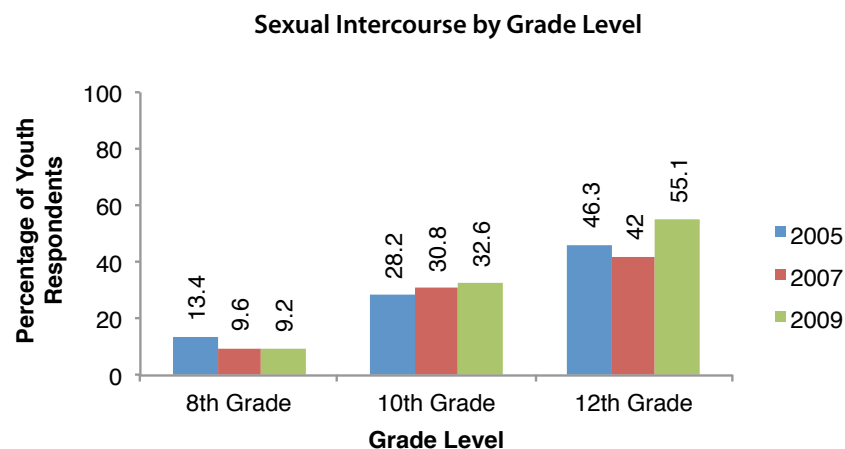
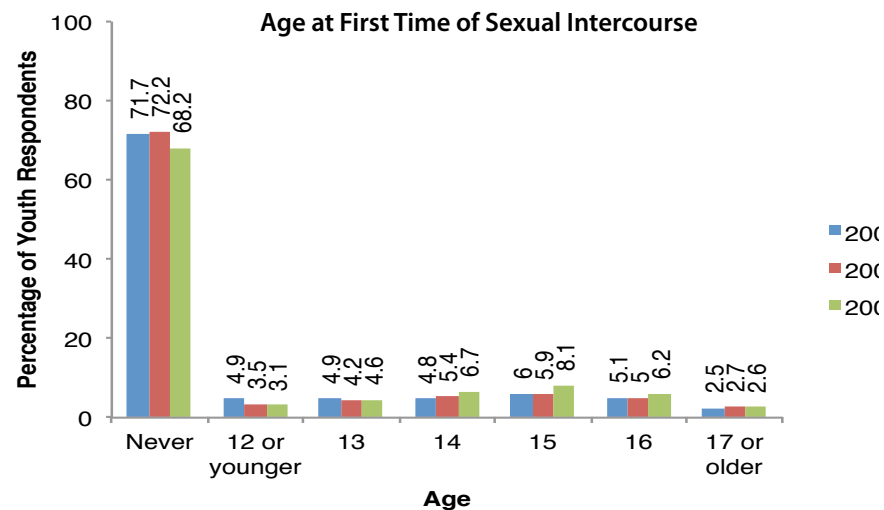
What does this measure?

Youth respondents were asked to report their ages the first time they had sexual intercourse. These responses were also categorized by current grade level.

How are we doing?

The number of youth remaining abstinent has decreased from 72.2 percent in 2007 to 68.2 percent in 2009. Sexual activity has slightly decreased in 8th graders, with an increase among 10th and 12th graders.

According to the Virginia Center for Health Statistics, Harrisonburg City has nearly twice the state rate for teen pregnancies among 15 to 17-year-olds. The state rate is 22.3 per 1000 while the rate in Harrisonburg City is 40.9 per 1000, and Rockingham County is 23.9 per 1000. In other words, there were 149 total teen pregnancies in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County in 2009. Fifty three of these pregnancies were among teens 15 to 17 years of age.



Youth Suicidal Behavior

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the Virginia Department of Health (2009) statistics report that suicide continues to be the third leading cause of death among young people aged 10 to 24 years, both in Virginia and nationally. On average, two young people in Virginia commit suicide each week. For each young person who commits suicide, 90 to 100 others make an attempt.

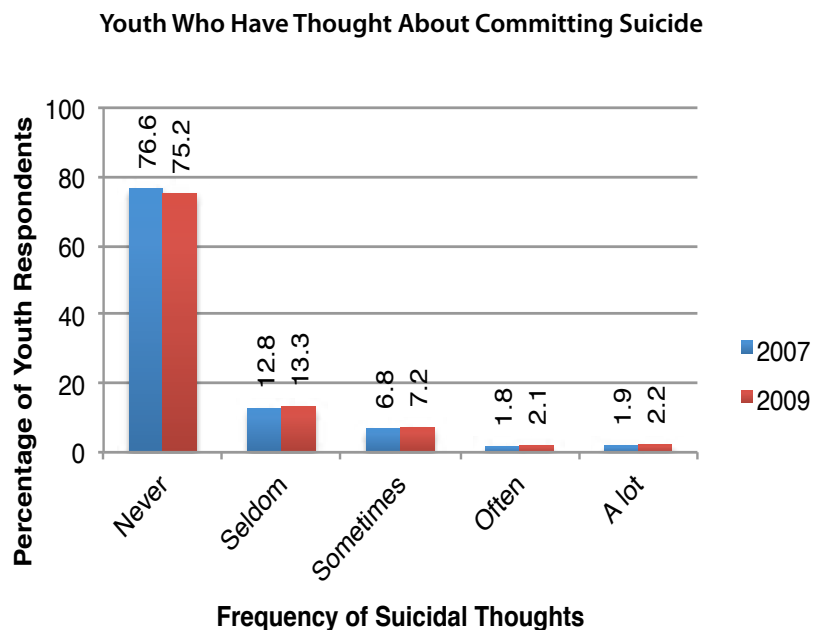
Nationally there has been a gradual decrease since 2003 in the number of youth who seriously considered attempting suicide, made a plan about how they would attempt suicide, and attempted suicide one or more times. According to the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, 13.8 percent of youth report having seriously considered attempting suicide within the past year.

What does this measure?

Youth respondents were asked whether they had thoughts about committing suicide.

How are we doing?

The most recent (2009) Youth Data Survey results for Harrisonburg and Rockingham County show a small decline in the number of youth who reported having thoughts of suicide: 75.2 percent of youth have never thought of committing suicide in 2009, a 1.4 percent decrease from 2007. Community support will continue to reduce suicidal thinking in our youth. We must develop measurements and outcomes that encourage youth who have thought of suicide to seek help. Research indicates that young people who have previously thought of “who they would tell” are more likely to seek help during a crisis. The 2009 Youth Data Survey documented this: 31.5 percent of youth said they would not tell anyone if they were considering suicide. This number has remained nearly identical since 2007.



*Data unavailable for 2005; question not included in the survey until 2007.

Youth Tobacco

According to the United States National Youth Tobacco Survey in 2009, an estimated 11.6 percent of Americans aged 12 to 17 had used a tobacco product in the last month. Our community has collaborated in the last 10 years to develop a number of social norms marketing initiatives to decrease tobacco use by our young people.

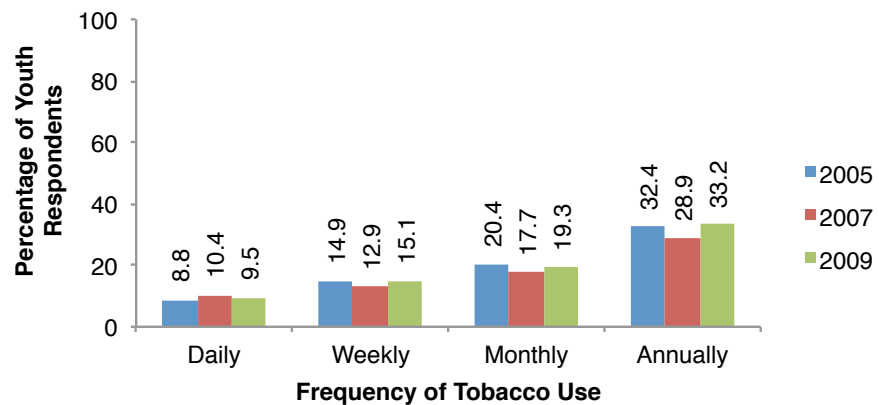
What does this measure?

The survey asked youth to report how frequently they use tobacco. The survey also asked the youth to specify the tobacco products they use.

How are we doing?

As depicted in the graph below, tobacco use in Harrisonburg City and Rockingham County decreased from 2005 to 2007 and did not increase in 2009. Locally, monthly tobacco use is 19.3 percent, which is 7.7 percent greater than the national rate among youth. Locally, the use of cigars has decreased by 0.8 percent; however, the use of both cigarettes and smokeless tobacco has increased. Despite rates of tobacco use, the overwhelming majority of local youth report that tobacco products are harmful to their health.

Cumulative Frequency of Tobacco Use



Weekly Frequency of Tobacco Use by Product

