

2023 Middle School Executive Summary

Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

November 2024

The Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is part of a national school-based survey that monitors the health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and young adults including:

- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries, violence and personal safety,
- Sexual behaviors related to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections,
- Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use,
- Behaviors related to nutrition and physical activity, and
- Protective factors.

Vermont 2023 YRBS At-A-Glance

106 of the 110 eligible middle schools participated.

12,367 students in grades 6–8 completed the survey.

The overall middle school response rate is **79%**.

75 questions were in the 2023 survey.

The Vermont high school YRBS has been conducted every other spring since 1993, a middle school survey was added in 2011. Schools ending in sixth grade are not eligible to participate. Copies of the 2023 Vermont [high school](#) and [middle school](#) surveys as well as previous surveys can be found online at HealthVermont.gov/YRBS.

Why Are These Data Important?

The YRBS is used to determine health behaviors and trends. It can detect changes in risk behaviors over time and identify differences among subpopulations of students. With this data, school and community organizations can focus prevention efforts and determine whether school policies and community programs are having the intended effect on student behaviors. Think of the YRBS as a tool for starting discussions, educating the community, and planning or evaluating programs.

About the Report

The [2023 YRBS Report](#) shows the overall prevalence rate and statistical differences by demographic subgroups including sex, grade, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. New in 2023, the high school report also includes differences among students with an IEP or 504 Plan. In addition to showing students' behaviors and experiences in 2023, this report also highlights changes from 2021 to 2023 and how the data has changed over the past ten years.

YRBS results are weighted by sex, grade and race/ethnicity to compensate for absenteeism and incomplete surveys. The weighting allows the results to be fully representative of middle school students in grades six through eight (middle school survey) and high school students grades nine through 12 (high school survey). To ensure confidentiality, estimates must include a numerator of at least five students and denominator of 50 or more students.

Learn more about the YRBS program or view additional reports and data briefs on special topics at HealthVermont.gov/YRBS.

What are some of the findings from the 2023 report?

Sunscreen use is 1.5 times higher compared to sunscreen use in 2013.

- Use of sunscreen when outside for more than one hour on a sunny day was last asked in 2013. In 2023, four in ten middle school students (42%) report wearing sunscreen most of the time or always, 1.5 times as many in 2013 (27%).

Many middle school students experience poor mental health, sadness, self-harm, and suicide risk.

- When asked about their mental health over the last 30 days, a quarter of middle school students (25%) said that their mental health was not good most of the time or always.
- About a quarter of middle school students (24%) report feeling so sad or hopeless during at least two weeks in the past year that they stopped doing some usual activities.
- During their lifetime, 21% of middle school students have done something to purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die such as cutting or burning themselves on purpose.
- One in five middle school students (20%) have seriously thought about killing themselves. One in seven (15%) have made a plan about how they would kill themselves and 7% have tried to kill themselves.

LGBTQ+ students and female students are experiencing significantly higher levels of poor mental health, anxiety and sadness compared to their peers. They are two to three times more likely to ever hurt themselves on purpose and ever think about, plan, or attempt to kill themselves.

- LGBTQ+ students are nearly 2.5 times as likely to experience poor mental health, including stress, anxiety and depression, most of the time or always during past 30 days compared to heterosexual cisgender students (46% vs 19%). Compared to male students, female students are more than two times as likely to experience poor mental health (36% vs 14%).
- LGBTQ+ (44%) and female students (34%) are more than two times more likely to report feeling so sad or hopeless for at least two weeks during the past year that they stopped doing some usual activities compared to their peers.
- During their lifetime, LGBTQ+ are roughly three times more likely than heterosexual cisgender students to have hurt themselves on purpose (43% vs 15%), have serious thoughts about killing themselves (40% vs 14%), make a suicide plan (32% vs 10%) and attempt to kill themselves (17% vs 5%).
- Female students are twice as likely as male students to hurt themselves on purpose (30% vs 12%), have serious thoughts about killing themselves (27% vs 13%), make a suicide plan (20% vs 10%) and attempt to kill themselves (10% vs 4%).

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New in 2023: When feeling sad, empty, angry, hopeless or anxious most middle school students are able to get some help and have someone they can talk to about their feelings.

- When feeling sad, empty, angry, hopeless or anxious, four in ten middle school students (41%) said they could always or at least most of the time get the kind of help they need. About two in ten (22%) sometimes get the help they need.
- When feeling sad, empty, angry, hopeless or anxious, a third of middle school students (33%) said they are most likely to talk with a parent or other family member about their feelings. Three in ten (31%) would talk to a friend. One in five (20%) were not sure who they would talk to.

Rates of feeling sad, hopeless, or thinking about suicide have statistically increased in the past decade.

- The percent of middle school students feeling so sad or hopeless during at least two weeks in the past year that they stopped doing some usual activities statistically increased from 18% in 2013 to 24% in 2023.
- Seriously thinking about suicide statistically increased from 17% in 2013 to 20%, making a suicide plan statistically increased from 11% in 2013 to 15%, and making a suicide attempt statistically increased from 5% in 2013 to 7%.

Female and LGBTQ+ students are more likely to experience bullying than their peers.

- Nearly half of all middle school students (47%) report being bullied on school property. One in three (30%) have been electronically bullied.
 - Nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ+ students (62%) and more than half (54%) of female students report being bullied on school property, significantly more than their heterosexual cisgender (43%) and male (40%) peers.
 - Roughly four in ten LGBTQ+ (43%) and female (39%) students have been electronically bullied compared to heterosexual and cisgender (27%) and male (22%) students.
- During the past 30 days, more than a quarter of middle school students (27%) were bullied.
 - LGBTQ+ students are nearly two times as likely to experience bullying in the past 30 days compared to heterosexual cisgender students (40% vs 23%).
 - Two-thirds of female students (34%) report being bullied in the past 30 days compared to one in five male students (21%).

Experiencing and witnessing violence differs by sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, and race and ethnicity.

- Two in five middle school students (40%) have been in a physical fight. Roughly half of male students (51%) and BIPOC students (48%) have report being in a fight.
- One in eight middle school students (13%) have had someone do sexual things to them that they did not want such as kissing, touching, or sexual intercourse.

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- Female students and LGBTQ+ students are twice as likely as male students (19% vs 7%) and heterosexual cisgender students (25% vs 10%) to experience unwanted sexual things.
- About one in five BIPOC students (19%) have experienced unwanted sexual contact, significantly more than white non-Hispanic students (12%).
- About one in seven students (15%) report seeing someone physically attacked, beaten, stabbed, or shot in their neighborhood. Nearly a quarter of BIPOC students (24%) have witnessed violence in their neighborhood.

Female, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC students are more likely to skip school due to safety concerns.

- About one in eight middle school students (12%) report skipping school during the past 30 days because they feel unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.
 - During the past 30 days, 16% of female students, 19% of LGBTQ+ students, and 16% of BIPOC students skipped school because they feel unsafe.

Electronic vapor product and marijuana use has increased over time. Alcohol use has decreased.

- About one in 15 middle school students (6%) used an electronic vapor product in the past 30 days. This is a statistical increase from 3% in 2015 and 5% in 2021.
- About one in 25 middle school students (4%) report using marijuana in the past 30 days. This is a statistical increase compared to 2013 (3%) and 2021 (3%).
- One in 20 middle school students (5%) drank alcohol in the past 30 days, statistically fewer than 2013 (7%).

Many middle school students report the presence of protective factors, but disparities exist.

- Most middle school students (87%) report eating dinner with a parent or other adult family member four or more times during the previous week. About two-thirds (67%) did so every day.
- Two-thirds of middle school students (65%) have at least one teacher or other adult at school they can talk to if they have a problem. One in five (18%) are not sure if there is someone at their school they can talk to.
- Just over half of middle school students (56%) agree or strongly agree that their school has clear rules and consequences for behavior.
 - Agreeing or strongly agreeing that their school has clear rules and consequences significantly decreases with each grade level from 64% in 6th grade to 57% in 7th grade and 50% in 8th grade.
- A quarter (25%) of middle school students believe they are treated badly or unfairly at school because of their race and ethnicity. This was a new question in 2023.
 - More than half of all BIPOC students (53%) feel they are treated unfairly at school because of their race or ethnicity.

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- One in eight middle school students (13%) participate in ten or more hours of afterschool activities such as sports, band, drama, or clubs run by their school or community during a typical school week. About a third participate in one to four hours (35%). Another third (35%) do not participate in any extracurricular activities during a typical week. This was a new question in 2023.
- During the past year, about seven in ten middle school students (69%) report playing on at least one sports team run by their school or a community organization.
 - Heterosexual cisgender students are statistically more likely to be on one or more sport teams compared to LGBTQ+ students (76% vs 51%).
- A majority of middle school students (60%) use social media multiple times a day. Twenty-nine percent say they use it several times a day, 5% check it once an hour, and 27% say they are on social media more than once an hour. This was a new question in 2023.
- Just over half of all middle school students (56%) agree or strongly agree that they matter to people in their community, 29% are not sure.
 - Less than two in five (38%) of LGBTQ+ students agree or strongly agree that they matter to people in their community. More than six in ten (62%) of heterosexual cisgender students believe they matter to people in their community.
 - Female (49%) and BIPOC students (50%) are significantly less likely than male (62%) and white, non-Hispanic students (57%) to feel like they matter to people in their community.



More Information and Contact

Additional information about the Vermont YRBS, including the full [2023 YRBS Report](#), other executive summaries and reports, population in focus reports, and topic specific data briefs, is available at HealthVermont.gov/YRBS.

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