



## NJDOE News

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### **Student Health Survey Tracks Student Internet, Video Game Use**

On an average school day, 26 percent of New Jersey high school students spend three or more hours playing video games or surfing the Internet, according to the results of the 2007 Student Health Survey released today by state Department of Education.

When combined with watching television, the survey revealed that more than 57 percent of high schoolers spent three or more hours on electronic viewing during the average school day. Among these students, approximately half reported watching TV, being on the Internet or playing video games for five or more hours per day.

These results mark the first time in the biennial report's 16-year history that students were asked about their Internet and video game use.

The survey was completed in the spring of 2007 by 1,677 students at 29 public high schools. The high schools were selected by random sample and school officials had to agree to participate; individual student participation was voluntary, anonymous and required parental consent.

Students answered questions about health-related behavior in six areas linked closely to preventable illness and injury among young people: unintentional injuries (safety) and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and drug use; sexual behavior; dietary behavior; and physical activity.

"Capturing an honest account of teen behavior is important for the overall health and educational well-being of New Jersey's young people," said Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy. "It is important for parents and educators to understand the habits of our youth and the pressures they face every day so we can help them make healthy life choices."

Most areas surveyed in 2007 showed stable rates in student behaviors. Key findings in the survey include:

- The percent of students who were involved in a physical fight in the 12 months preceding the survey remained the same at 31 percent as in 2005; students who were involved in a physical fight on school property and those who carried a weapon also remained steady at 10 percent and 11 percent, respectively.
- Lifetime use of marijuana and cocaine continued at 36 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Recent use (within the month prior to the survey) of marijuana and cocaine also were unchanged from 2005 findings, at 19 percent and 3 percent respectively. Lifetime use of inhalants, steroids, methamphetamines, heroin and needle use all were similar to levels in 2005, maintaining reductions from 2001 levels of lifetime use.
- The number of students who reported being offered, sold or given an illegal drug on school property within the previous 12 months decreased to 25 percent in 2007 - down from a high of 33 percent in 2005.
- Lifetime alcohol consumption decreased three percentage points to 76 percent compared to 2005. Recent alcohol use and recent binge drinking both increased four percentage points to 51 percent and 31 percent, respectively.
- Lifetime and recent cigarette use both declined in 2007 to 47 percent and 19 percent, respectively.
- Among sexually active students, the risk factors of failing to use a condom and not using any birth control method, and using alcohol or drugs prior to sex both increased from 2005 levels. No use of condoms increased to 35 percent from 29 percent in 2005; no use of birth control increased to 11 percent from 7 percent two years earlier. Use of alcohol and drugs prior to sex was almost the same as in 2005 at 23 percent.

The 2007 survey also asked for the first time about whether students practice Internet safety and if they have purposefully cut themselves.

Survey results showed that 21 percent of students had been asked during the previous 12 months to meet in person someone they knew only from the Internet. The survey also revealed that 27 percent of students reported having met in person over their lifetime one or more unknown contacts they met online.

Ten percent of students also reported that they purposefully had injured themselves during the previous 12 months by cutting themselves deep enough to draw blood. About two thirds of students who reported cutting themselves were female.

Since New Jersey student participation rates for 2007 did not meet the minimum standards set by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the data could not be included in its national survey. However, it was weighted to allow for comparisons to prior New Jersey student health surveys.

The Bloustein Center for Survey Research at Rutgers University, which administered the survey, analyzed the results and prepared the report, included an analysis of key risk behavior rates among New Jersey students to their national counterparts in 2007.

The analysis shows that New Jersey students chose less risky behavior overall than their national peers in the following categories: rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol; carried a weapon; involved in a physical fight; lifetime cigarette use; watched television three or more hours per day; and drank regular soda at least once a day. New Jersey students were at greater risk than students across the United States in current alcohol use and episodic heavy drinking, and for not meeting the recommended levels of physical activity.

DOE provides to all high schools a summary brochure about the survey to allow for wide dissemination of findings to both school and community members who play a role in promoting healthy adolescent development. DOE and other state government departments and agencies also use survey results when developing policies and programs that address adolescent behavior.

The New Jersey Student Health Survey, which has been administered every other year since 1993, is a collaborative effort with the Department of Health and Senior Services and the Department of Law and Public Safety.

The summary report, the detailed report and data tables can be found on DOE's N.J. Student Health Survey Web page at <http://www.nj.gov/education/students/yrbs/>.

For further information on the content of this news release, please call the DOE Office of Public Information at 609-292-1126.