



Desert Mountain Children's Center

Apple Valley: 17800 Highway 18 Apple Valley, CA 92307 | (760) 955-3601

Big Bear: 42007 Fox Farm Road, Suite 2A, Big Bear Lake, CA 92315 | (909) 866-2165

Yucca Valley: 58967 Business Center Drive, Suites C and D, Yucca Valley, CA 92284 | (760) 369-3130

Youth Health and Well-Being

Steering Committee

September 1, 2024

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently released the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) for 2021-2023 that also includes trends report from 2013-2023¹. This report provides information on the health behaviors and experiences of high school students in the United States. The survey covers six main areas of health-risk behaviors:

1. Unintentional injuries and violence
 - Including substance use and bullying
2. Sexual behaviors
 - Leading to unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections
3. Substance use
 - Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
4. Dietary behaviors
5. Physical activity
6. Mental health

Here's a summary of the 2021-2023 findings across key areas:

1. Mental Health

- A significant rise in poor mental health was observed among students.
- Over 40% of students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless.
- Rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors increased, particularly among females and LGBTQ+ students.

2. Substance Use

- Decreases in traditional tobacco use, such as smoking cigarettes, continued.
- E-cigarette use (vaping) remained common, with around 14-15% of high school students reporting regular vaping.

3. Violence and Bullying

- Bullying (both in person and online) remained a significant concern.



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- Approximately 15-20% of students experienced bullying on school property, with more females reporting being bullied than males.
- Incidences of physical violence, including weapon carrying on school grounds, also remained a risk for many students.

4. Sexual Behaviors

- The number of sexually active high school students declined.
- Condom use decreased though, raising concerns about risks for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

5. Physical Activity and Diet

- Fewer students reported being physically active for 60 minutes or more per day.
- There was also a concerning rise in poor dietary habits, such as skipping meals or not consuming enough fruits and vegetables, contributing to overall health risks.

6. LGBTQ+ Youth

- LGBTQ+ students reported significantly higher rates of mental health challenges, including depression, suicidal ideation, and bullying.
- LGBTQ+ students are particularly vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and victimization in both school and social environments.

The YRBS 2021-2023 highlighted persistent challenges related to mental health, particularly among marginalized groups, and ongoing concerns about substance use and other risky behaviors. There are also areas of improvement in some risk behaviors, such as reductions in cigarette smoking and sexual activity, but new concerns have emerged with rising mental health crises and disparities in student well-being.

Here's a summary of the key trends from **2013 to 2023** in major risk behavior categories:

1. Mental Health

- Increasing Mental Health Challenges:
 - From 2013 to 2023, mental health issues, particularly feelings of persistent sadness, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation, increased sharply.
 - In 2023, over 40% of students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, compared to about 30% in 2013.



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- Suicidal thoughts and attempts have risen significantly among female students and LGBTQ+ youth, with LGBTQ+ students reporting particularly high rates of emotional distress.

2. Substance Use

- **Declining Cigarette Use:**
 - There has been a dramatic decline in cigarette smoking.
 - In 2013, about 15.7% of high school students smoked cigarettes.
 - In 2023, this number dropped to under 6%.
- **Vaping Surge, Then Stabilization:**
 - Vaping surged in popularity from 2015 to 2019, with rates reaching as high as 28%.
 - After 2019, the rate stabilized but remained relatively high, with about 14-15% of students still vaping in 2023.
- **Alcohol and Other Drug Use:**
 - Alcohol consumption and marijuana use have both decreased since 2013.
 - In 2023, fewer students reported drinking alcohol compared to a decade earlier.
 - Marijuana use has remained relatively stable since 2019.
 - Opioid and prescription drug misuse has also shown a slight decline.

3. Violence and Bullying

- **Bullying and Cyberbullying:**
 - In-person bullying has shown a modest decrease over the years, from about 20% in 2013 to around 15% in 2023.
 - However, cyberbullying remained a serious issue, with little change in prevalence over time.
- **Violence in Schools:**
 - There was a decrease in students reporting weapon carrying at school and being involved in physical fights, suggesting schools have become somewhat safer.
 - Despite this, the risk of violence remains significant, especially for certain subgroups like LGBTQ+ students.

4. Sexual Behavior

- **Declining Sexual Activity:**
 - Fewer students have reported being sexually active over time.
 - In 2013, about 34% of students were sexually active, but this fell to around 27% by 2023.



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- Decreasing Condom Use:
 - Although sexual activity has declined, the use of condoms among sexually active students has also dropped.
 - This decline in condom use, from 60% in 2013 to under 50% in 2023, raises concerns about protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

6. LGBTQ+ Youth Trends

- Mental Health Disparities:
 1. LGBTQ+ students have consistently reported worse mental health outcomes compared to their heterosexual peers.
 2. This trend has worsened from 2013 to 2023, with higher rates of bullying, discrimination, and suicidal ideation among this group.
- Increased Violence and Victimization:
 1. LGBTQ+ students are more likely to face violence, including physical attacks and bullying.
 2. This trend has remained alarmingly high over the past decade, with little progress in improving their school safety and mental well-being.

From 2013 to 2023, trends in youth risk behavior show both positive and concerning shifts. The positive trends include declines in cigarette smoking, alcohol use, and physical fighting. The concerning trends include rising mental health issues, particularly among female and LGBTQ+ students, persistent vaping, and declining condom use among those youth reporting sexual activity. Efforts to address mental health needs, reduce substance use, and improve sexual health education and school safety, are critical to reversing some of these worrying trends.

Schools are uniquely positioned to reach many youths with strategies that can lessen the impact of negative experiences and improve their health and well-being. Therefore, schools can play a crucial role in addressing youth risk behaviors and promoting the health and well-being of students through education, prevention, and early intervention efforts. If your school or district is already using the Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model, the following suggested strategies from the CDC should enhance any work your district and/or school has already started.

The CDC has identified six school-based strategies and associated approaches² to help alleviate any mental health challenges your students may be facing and promote the positive behavioral and mental health of your students. These strategies and approaches include:



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1. Increase Mental Health Literacy of Students
 - Deliver classroom-based mental health education curricula
 - Use peer-led modeling programs
2. Promote Mindfulness
 - Deliver classroom-based mindfulness education
 - Dedicate time for students to independently practice mind
 - Offer small group mindfulness activities
3. Promote Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Learning
 - Provide classroom instruction focused on building social skills and emotional development
 - Offer targeted education focused on teaching social skills and emotional development
4. Enhance Connectedness Among Students, Staff, and Families
 - Provide relationship-building programs
5. Provide Psychosocial Skills Training and Cognitive Behavioral Health Interventions
 - Promote acceptance and commitment to change
 - Provide cognitive behavioral interventions
 - Engage students in coping skills training groups
6. Support Staff Well-Being
 - Offer mindfulness-training programs
 - Provide therapeutic resources

The CDC provides a guide³ to help schools get started, along with additional information regarding each of these strategies and approaches. Schools are central to students' daily lives, they provide a structured and supportive environment, and can influence both students and their families. Their unique position and resources make them the most effective place to address youth risk behaviors and promote positive health outcomes. The DMCC is here to assist any of our service districts and their schools with any of these strategies and approaches through the many programs we offer. We look forward to continuing to partner with you to make a difference in the lives of the children and families we serve!



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References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023* U S Department of Health and Human Services; 2024.
2. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health-action-guide/index.html?s_cid=hy-2023
3. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health-action-guide/pdf/CDC-MH-Action-Guide_How-to-Get-Started.pdf

Resources:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/>
 - https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health-action-guide/pdf/DASH_MH_Action_Guide_508.pdf
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/hecat/index.htm>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/whatworks/what-works-overview.htm>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
 - <https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you>
- <https://www.nami.org/Home>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>
- <https://sogiecenter.org/>
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/get-involved/digital-shareables/mental-health-resources-for-students-and-educators>
- <https://mhanational.org/>

