



Facts about the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey

What is the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS)?

The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey is one of the most important sources of information about the health and wellbeing of young people in our state. Working in partnership with the Maine CDC and DOE to administer the survey every two years since 2009, MIYHS provides schools and communities with data on students' health behaviors, beliefs and attitudes. With the information gathered in these surveys, state and local partners can provide focused support to school districts to address health challenges facing young people.

Other important information about the MIYHS:

- The MIYHS is administered to students in 5th/6th grades, middle school, and high school. All public or quasi-public middle and high schools in Maine are invited to participate.
- More than 75% of students in schools administering the MIYHS participate in the survey.
- MIYHS data, sample questionnaires, and detailed information about the survey process can be found at <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/>.
- It is an Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved survey.

How does the MIYHS support the choices of families and students?

Student participation in MIYHS is **always** voluntary. This means that schools choose to administer the MIYHS although every school in Maine should provide their students the opportunity to participate. Families and students also decide whether they want to take the survey. No student is ever required to complete the MIYHS.

- Several weeks before the MIYHS is administered, schools send letters out to families providing information about the survey and giving parents/guardians the opportunity to opt their child out of participating.
 - Families can reach out to their school at any time and let them know they do not want their student to take the survey.

Just as it is important that families and students who don't want to take the survey are able to opt-out, it's equally critical that those who *do* wish to participate in MIYHS are able to do so. Ultimately, most students in MIYHS schools choose to complete the survey.

How does MIYHS protect students' privacy?

The MIYHS is **completely anonymous**. Students do not provide their names as part of the survey, and data on individual students are **never** tracked or identified. MIYHS data are used to support health and prevention programs at the population level, and to track trends in youth health over time.

Why does MIYHS ask students about potentially sensitive topics?

The MIYHS asks about a wide range of health behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. These questions reflect many of the concerns of parents and communities, for example, around youth depression and substance use. Research shows asking students about their experiences does not increase the likelihood they will engage in risky behaviors. In fact, since 2009 reported behaviors like cigarette smoking, alcohol use, and sexual activity have been decreasing, even as more students participate in the MIYHS.

Experts from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a wide range of child/adolescent health specialists review each survey question to ensure that the language is age appropriate. Fifth and sixth grade students, middle schoolers, and high school students complete different versions of the MIYHS that are carefully developed to best reflect their experiences and understanding.

Fully understanding an issue allows communities to come up with effective solutions and identify progress. Reports using MIYHS data are publicly available and have been critical to informing Maine CDC's work on health concerns facing youth, such as vaping, mental health, and school safety.

How is the MIYHS data used?

A wide range of health and education partners use the MIYHS results. MIYHS data provide information on what Maine children are experiencing, specifically around concerns like drug/alcohol use, depression, and suicide/self-harm. The data also help us understand which programs are effective, what interventions are needed for the future, and what kinds of supports are needed for youth in communities across the state. MIYHS data has:

- Helped Maine's Drug Free Communities coalitions track their impact on the prevention of substance use among students in their partnering school systems.
- Highlighted the need to increase access to mental health services and supports through partnerships between schools and community behavioral health agencies.
- Helped Maine CDC and Maine DOE, local health coalitions, and school districts secure grants that fund a wide range of youth health initiatives.

The MIYHS team at Maine CDC and Maine DOE deeply appreciate the support of so many Maine schools, families, and students. Your willingness to participate and invest in this valuable resource is essential to support the health of young people across our state.