



For Immediate Release  
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### **Hamilton County high school students fall short of physical activity and nutrition guidelines**

Chattanooga, TN - The majority of Hamilton County high school students fail to meet recommended guidelines for physical activity and nutrition, according to the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Hamilton County Regional Health Council. The CDC recommends teens participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day and limit their screen time to two hours per day.

- 59 percent of students reported three or more hours of screen time (TV, video games, internet browsing)
- Three out of four students did not participate in 60 or more minutes of physical activity on each of the 7 days before the survey
- More than 35 percent drank at least one sugar-sweetened soft drink per day, while 18 percent consumed three or more soft drinks per day
- 80 percent did not eat the recommended five daily servings of fruits and vegetables

"These findings reflect the growing influence of technology among teens and highlight how it has altered their habits. Thirty-five percent reported five or more hours of screen time per day," said Ione Farrar, community health planner at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "Three or more hours of screen time per day was associated with higher soft drink consumption, higher rates of overweight and obesity, and less physical activity," she added.

Twenty-seven percent of high school students were either overweight (15 percent) or obese (12 percent), based on self-reported height and weight.

- The incidence of overweight and obesity was significantly higher among black (36 percent) and Latino (37 percent) students than among white students (23 percent)
- Males (14 percent) were more likely to be obese than females (10 percent)
- Females were more likely than males to say they were overweight, regardless of obesity status
- 41 percent of all students were trying to lose weight

"Overall, the numbers for overweight and obesity have not changed since the last survey in 2002, although they are still too high," said Rae Young Bond, executive director, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society and Medical Foundation of Chattanooga and Regional Health Council member. "An unhealthy diet and lack of exercise are major risk factors for overweight and obesity and also contribute to the development of chronic diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes and other illnesses," said Bond.

(more)

The overwhelming majority of students who were trying to lose weight reported using healthy weight loss methods such as dietary modifications or exercise. However, 26 percent also reported unhealthy approaches such as fasting (22 percent), non-prescribed weight loss products (8 percent), and purging (6 percent).

“All of these findings indicate we need to do a better job of educating our young people on the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Young people do not always grasp why healthy habits are so important to their long term well being, as well as their academic success,” said Bond. “It is an issue the nation is struggling with, but we know that a positive shift to more healthful habits is possible,” she added.

The 2011 YRBS also focused on asthma, since it is one of the most common causes of school absenteeism. Children with asthma miss 2.5 more days of school than their peers, according to national data. The incidence of asthma among Hamilton County high school students is significantly higher than the state and the nation.

- 26 percent of students have ever been diagnosed with asthma, compared to 18 percent in Tennessee and 22 percent in the U.S.
- 14 percent currently have asthma, compared to 11 percent in both Tennessee and the U.S.
- 3,200 students in Hamilton County schools have been identified by their parents as having asthma; of those, 364 are in grades 9 through 12
- Black students have significantly higher asthma rates than white or Latino students

School officials note that the actual number of students with asthma is probably higher because some parents do not report medical conditions.

To view this and other 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reports, visit our website

<http://health.hamiltontn.org/CHS/CommunityAssessmentPlanning.aspx>

### **About the Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

A total of 3,492 high school students representing 19 public and 6 private schools in Hamilton County took the anonymous and voluntary survey. The response rate was 69.6 percent. 2011 marked the third YRBS; previous surveys were conducted in 1998 and 2002, with 2,990 and 2,752 completed surveys, respectively.

Funding for the survey was provided by the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department, the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, First Things First, OnPoint, Public Education Foundation, the Medical Foundation of Chattanooga, and Bea Lurie (Girls Inc.).

The Regional Health Council serves as the lead community-based organization designated by the Tennessee Department of Health and is responsible for community health assessment, regional health planning, and the provision of input regarding funding decisions for health and health related initiatives.

The Regional Health Council has presented a series of briefings on different aspects of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey including risky sexual behavior; alcohol, tobacco, and substance abuse; and health and wellness. Youth violence, bullying, and weapon carrying is forthcoming.

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