



For Immediate Release
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Survey finds more than half of high school students are sexually experienced

Chattanooga, TN – The number of Hamilton County high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse has decreased from 58 percent in 1998 to 46 percent in 2011, according to the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Hamilton County Regional Health Council. However, 43 percent of students reported having engaged in oral sex in the 2011 report. Overall, 55 percent of students were sexually experienced in one or both behaviors.

"While we are seeing some promising trends since the first survey in 1998, it also demonstrates that parents need to talk to their children more openly about these issues," said Rae Young Bond, executive director, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society and Medical Foundation of Chattanooga, and a member of the Regional Health Council.

The report documents that risk behaviors tend to cluster. Sexually active students were 2.5 times more likely to also smoke, drink, or use marijuana than non sexually active students (65 percent compared to 26 percent) and 5.3 times more likely to do all three (16 percent compared to 3 percent). In addition, 21 percent of sexually active students indicated they had used alcohol or drugs before the last time they had sex.

"Research shows that parental beliefs and attitudes have a strong influence on student behavior, so as uncomfortable as these conversations might be, they are extremely important," said Ione Farrar, assessment and planning program manager at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "This is especially the case because of the clustering of risky behaviors and because some students report having sexual activity before the age of 13," Farrar noted.

Students were classified into four risk categories based on their current participation in four key risk behaviors: smoking, drinking, marijuana use, and sexual intercourse.

- Extreme risk-takers (all 4 categories) – 5 percent
- Multiple risk-takers (2 or 3 risks) – 23 percent
- Minimal risk-takers (1 risk) – 22 percent
- Non risk-takers (no risks) – 50 percent

(more)

The percentage of non risk takers declined with grade level, from 66 percent of ninth graders to 36 percent of twelfth graders.

Additional findings:

- 8 percent reported that they had sex for the first time before age thirteen, and 8 percent of all students had engaged in oral sex before age 13
- One-third of students reported they were currently sexually active (have had sexual intercourse in the past three months)
- 15 percent indicated they have had four or more sexual partners
- 43 percent of students had *ever* engaged in oral sex
- 45 percent of students had *never* engaged in either sexual intercourse or oral sex

Sexually active students cited condoms as the most frequently used form of birth control the last time they had intercourse, at 47 percent. An additional 22 percent used either birth control pills or Depo-Provera. However, 18 percent either did not use birth control last time or could not remember the method; 10 percent relied on withdrawal.

Sexual risk behaviors place adolescents at risk for sexually transmitted diseases. "In 2009, teens between 10 and 19 years old accounted for more than 36 percent of new Chlamydia and gonorrhea cases in Hamilton County," said Farrar. "Among students in this age group, there were 698 Chlamydia cases and 200 gonorrhea cases," she added.

Condoms, if used correctly, can greatly reduce but not eliminate the risk of STDs. Forty percent of sexually active students did not use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.

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. This year marked the third YRBS; previous surveys were conducted in 1998 and 2001, and response rates were 2,990 and 2,752, 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, 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 is hosting a series of briefings on different aspects of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Topics will focus on risky sexual behavior; alcohol, tobacco, and substance abuse; health and wellness; and youth violence, bullying, and weapon carrying.

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