

Adolescent Health Survey IV

Question Topics (For students)

About the Survey:

The purpose of the AHS IV is to learn about issues that can affect the health of high school students across British Columbia. This document provides information about the AHS IV questionnaire. It lists the topics and the reasons the questions are asked.

- The Adolescent Health Survey IV is made up of 146 questions.
- Students who are selected to be part of the provincial sample will be asked to fill out the anonymous survey during class.
- The survey can be completed in one class session of about 45 minutes.
- Participation is voluntary.

This questionnaire includes many of the same questions from previous Adolescent Health Surveys. These surveys took place in 1992, 1998, and 2003.

Survey Topics:

The AHS survey asks about topics that are related to youth health. The McCreary Centre Society believes health is not just the absence of illness. Health includes emotional, spiritual and physical well-being.

What do the questions ask about?

- They ask about experiences and behaviours that can lead to illness, injury or death during teen years
- They ask about behaviours that can have a long-term impact on health into adult life
- They ask about healthy behaviours and supports that can help young people's growth and well-being
- They ask about social, environmental, and economic factors that can also affect well-being

Why is it important to ask about these?

Questions on the AHS IV are asked to find out what kinds of health risks and health benefits young people have across the province. They examine preventable causes of poor health, as well as factors that are shown to have a positive influence on youth development.

Examples of things that may have a positive impact on youth health:

- Presence of caring families and other adults

- Safe schools
- Participation in sports and healthy leisure activities

Injuries are the major cause of death among youth in Canada. Many injuries can be prevented. These include:

- Motor vehicle crashes
- Accidental injuries
- Violence and suicide

Other causes of ill health among youth are also preventable. These include:

- Sexually-transmitted infections (STIs)
- Substance misuse

A small number of behaviors contribute to the main causes of death among youth:

- The misuse of drugs or alcohol
- Impaired driving
- Lack of seat belt use
- Lack of safety precautions during recreational activities
- Physical fighting
- Attempted suicide
- Unprotected sexual activity that can result in unwanted pregnancies and STIs, including HIV infection.

Behaviors that start during the teen years can lead to health problems for adults, like heart disease, stroke and cancer.

The behaviours that can lead to future health problems include:

- Use of tobacco
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Eating too many calories
- Not enough physical activity

Many of these health problems, which do not appear until later life, are preventable. That is why questions on the AHS IV ask about dieting, smoking and exercise.

Question Categories

Introductory questions 1-23

The first set of questions asks about you.

- **Questions 1-4** Ask about your age, sex, height and weight.
- **Questions 5-13** Ask about where you live/have lived, and your ethnic and cultural background.
- **Questions 14-22** Ask about who you have lived with, as well as things about your house.

Questions 24-34 (family)

These questions ask about home and family relationships.

Relationships at home and with family tend to have a strong influence on youth health. When youth feel their family cares about them, they are happier, less stressed, and do better in school. Teens who feel cared about are less likely to smoke, use drugs and alcohol, get into fights, or have sex at a young age.

- **Questions 24-30** Ask how you feel about your relationships with people in your family.
- **Questions 31-34** Ask questions about the time that you spend with your family.

Questions 35-42 (school)

School is another important influence on youth health. These questions ask about school experiences and safety. Youth who feel part of a safe and caring school are also more likely to report healthy behaviours, and less likely to be distressed.

- **Questions 35-38** Ask how you feel about school, as well as about your expectations of school.
- **Questions 39-42** Ask how you feel about people at school. They also ask about feelings of safety and belonging at school.

Questions 43-60 (health and weight issues)

This set of questions asks about students' opinions of their health and their bodies.

These questions explore common health concerns and access to medical or mental health services. They also ask about nutrition, dieting and eating disorders, which can be a serious health risk for some young people.

- **Questions 43-53** Ask general questions about your health. They ask about common health problems that limit activities and getting health care.
- **Questions 54-60** Ask about your eating habits. They also ask about what you think of your body, and ask if you are trying to lose or gain weight.

Questions 61-80 (use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco)

This section asks about student's use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Students who do not use drugs, alcohol or tobacco are told to skip these questions. The questions help to identify risk for injuries and other problems.

All of the questions in the survey are kept confidential. None of the answers can be tracked back to you personally.

- **Questions 61-74** Ask about drinking and doing drugs. For students who have used these substances, other questions ask at what age they started and how often they have been used.
- **Questions 75-80** Ask about tobacco use. For students who smoke or use tobacco, other questions ask at what age they started, and how often they do it.

AHS IV will help to track trends in drinking and drug use, and problems young people have from use.

Knowing what age people first try alcohol or drugs can help in planning prevention programs.

When smoking begins at an early age, it increases the risk of developing cancer. Second-hand smoke is also a health risk.

Questions 81-87 (motor vehicle and bicycle safety)

These questions ask about behaviours that commonly cause injuries among young people.

- **Questions 81-87** Ask about driving and the use of seat belts and bicycle helmets. This section also asks about driving after drinking alcohol or using marijuana.

Injuries are the leading cause of death for youth, and most injuries are preventable. Using seat belts, for example, can reduce motor vehicle deaths by 50%. Using a helmet can prevent a head injury, which is the leading cause of death in bicycle crashes. Drug and alcohol use also are linked to many injuries among youth.

Question 88 (sexual orientation)

One question asks whether a student is attracted to persons of the same or opposite sex. Previous AHS surveys found that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth had a higher risk for harassment and discrimination, low social support, suicide attempts and other health risks, it is important to see if this is changing for the better in BC.

Questions 89-103 (sexual behaviour)

This section asks questions about sexual behavior in order to check the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Students who are not sexually active are told to skip these questions and asked instead about the reasons they choose not to be sexually active.

- **Questions 89-103** Ask if you have ever had sex, the age you first had sex, the age of your first partner, number of sexual partners, use of condoms and birth control, use of alcohol and drugs before sex, and whether you have ever been or caused a pregnancy.
- **Question 102** asks if you have ever been forced to have sexual intercourse

Although these topics are often thought to be sensitive or personal, it is important to know how many youth face such risks as early pregnancy, infections, and even cervical cancer. Experiencing sexual coercion during childhood or youth is linked to poor health outcomes.

Questions 104-107 (injuries)

- **Questions 104-107** ask for information about recent injuries that were serious enough to require medical attention. Students are also asked about self-inflicted injuries.

Questions 108-116 (emotional health and social supports)

Physical health is strongly linked to emotional health too. The survey asks about how students feel about themselves, the stress in their lives, and who they can turn to for help.

- **Questions 108-112** Ask about how satisfied/unsatisfied, or positive or negative you feel about yourself overall. They also ask how much you feel stressed, nervous, hopeless, or overwhelmed.
- **Questions 113-116** Ask about ways that you cope with stress and negative feelings and where and who you go to for help and support.

Questions 117-121 (suicide)

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth in BC. These questions ask about suicidal thoughts and about actual suicide attempts. The information from these questions can guide education and prevention efforts to help reduce suicide among Canadian youth.

- **Questions 117-121** ask if suicide has had an impact on the lives of your friends or family, and asks about thoughts, plans or attempts of suicide in the past 12 months.

Questions 122-138 (safety, violence, abuse and harassment)

This section asks about young peoples' sense of safety and actual experiences of violence.

- **Questions 123-129** are about physical and sexual abuse, carrying weapons, physical fights and injuries.
- **Questions 130-138** are about feelings of safety and discrimination, as well as experiences of exclusion, harassment or bullying.
- **Question 136** is about Internet safety.

Youth violence is a concern of schools and communities. A history of abuse is connected with a range of risk behaviours and poor emotional health. Feeling safe at school is linked to higher academic achievement and lower risk taking.

Questions 139-146 (peer influences, physical activity and extracurricular activities)

The final set of questions asks about the influence of friends, levels of physical activity, and how students spend their leisure time.

- **Questions 139** Asks how your friends would feel if you got involved in risky or anti-social activities.
- **Questions 140-146** Ask if you take part in extra-curricular activities like: sports, music lessons, clubs, community or religious groups, and hobbies or crafts.
- **Questions 143-144** Ask about the amount of time you spend exercising and doing other things you in your spare time like watching TV or playing video and computer games.
- **Question 145** Asks about the different effects that the upcoming 2010 Olympics in Vancouver are having on physical activity, sports opportunities, and job prospects for young people.
- **Question 146** Asks about youth gambling.

The rise in Type 2 diabetes has raised concern about physical activity levels among young people. This concern is addressed by questions about “screen time,” or time spent inactively in front of the TV or computer, as well as the time youth spend exercising.

Question Sources

Most of the questions in the AHS survey were taken from previously developed and tested youth health surveys. Using questions that come from well-known studies has many advantages:

- 1) The questions have demonstrated they are understood by the youth who did the survey
- 2) The questions have demonstrated that they provide useful information
- 3) Responses can be compared with findings from other countries or regions where surveys were conducted.

Most other studies do not provide such detailed level of information about the health of youth in BC. Other Canadian surveys contain some BC youth, but the AHS is unique in its broad coverage of BC and its ability to provide regional data across the province.

A combination of approaches, taking items from other studies and creating items of particular interest in BC, has enabled The McCreary Centre Society to develop a survey tool which complements but does not duplicate other studies, and which provides additional information specific to this province.

Sources used in developing the AHS include:

- Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia;
- Adolescent Health Survey, Adolescent Health Program, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis;
- Urban Indian Youth Health Survey, School of Nursing, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis;
- Minnesota Student Surveys, Minnesota Department of Education;
- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), the Carolina Population Centre, University of North Carolina;
- Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children; World Health Organization (WHO) Cross-National Survey. (Coordinated by Research Center for Health Promotion, University of Bergen, Norway.)
- National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY); Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada;
- Tobacco Use in British Columbia, Angus Reid;
- Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure - Revised, Phinney & Ong, 2007;
- Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health;
- Family Affluence Scale, Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006;
- Girls on the Net, NetSafe: The Internet Safety Group;
- Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CARBC);
- 2002 Nova Scotia Drug Use Survey, Nova Scotia Department of Health: Addictions Services;
- Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement (CEYE);
- Many of the questions on the AHS were taken from multiple sources or developed and field-tested by The McCreary Centre Society project team. Such questions address topics of specific interest in BC or areas of emerging concern not covered by other surveys.