



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

The 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) will be conducted by trained public health nurses in nearly 2,000 BC schools between January and June 2018. The survey has been conducted every five years since 1992. It provides the most up-to-date and accurate information about what BC students in Grades 7–12 know, think and do about their health.

The survey takes most students about 30–40 minutes to complete and covers a range of topics that can affect health now and in later life. The survey results are used by schools, communities, government agencies, health professionals and by youth themselves to develop needed programs and policies and to see how effective current strategies are.

“As a parent and a district PAC volunteer, I have really appreciated the AHS data. It helps me and those I worked with around the DPAC table to have a greater appreciation for the health and well-being of our kids and served as a really helpful tool in getting more people interested in and mobilized in thinking about what else is possible in supporting the health and well-being of our kids and our school communities!”

—Cindy Andrew, Parent and former DPAC member,
Sooke School District

“As school counsellors, the information gathered by the BC AHS is invaluable in assessing the relative health and safety of our young people. Information captured by the district and provincial reports is an invaluable tool to advocate for additional services and resources to address what are often at the core of why some students are not being successful in the school system.”

—Dave MacKenzie, School Counsellor
Clarence Fulton Secondary School

Many of the questions on the survey have been asked since 1992 and cover topics such as school, relationships, physical and mental health, substance use, sexual activity and leisure activities. Others have been added for 2018 based on what youth, parents, teachers and other experts in youth health have told us is

important. These include questions about quality of sleep, technology use and time spent outdoors.

“As a classroom teacher, I used the AHS data to talk with my middle school students about the importance of sleep. This also got the students talking about how their phones wake them up at night, which led into a discussion about cell phone hygiene and the importance of shutting off devices well before going to sleep. They appreciated the fact that this came directly from teens across BC and that they felt the same way.”

—Mme Jennifer Gibson, Vice-Principal
École John Stubbs Memorial School

Additional information about sources of questions for the survey, methodology and previous survey results are available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

The survey is confidential, anonymous and voluntary for students. Students who do decide to participate can skip any questions they do not want to answer and can stop the survey at any time. Parents also have the opportunity to refuse participation for their child.

If your child’s class is randomly selected to take the survey, you will receive a letter explaining more about it. If you would like to see a copy of the survey before deciding if you would like your child to participate, one is available at the school.

No one will be able to link your child to their answers and no one except researchers at McCreary will see the surveys. They will be entered into a confidential data base and shredded after five years.

Grade 7–12 students have been involved throughout the development of the 2018 BC AHS, and it has been extensively pilot-tested with a diverse range of youth across BC.

“I am happy to see a survey like this one. It’s about time questions were being asked.”

— 2013 BC AHS participant



Some parents are concerned that asking about a behaviour (e.g., drinking alcohol) on a survey may encourage youth who have not previously done so to try it. Evidence collected over decades shows that asking about the health risk behaviours of BC students does not increase the likelihood that youth will want to try the behaviour. For example, each time the BC AHS has been conducted, it has asked students if they have considered or attempted suicide. Evidence from the BC Coroners Service shows there was no increase in youth suicide rates when the survey was conducted.

Similarly, asking about sexual activity and pregnancy on the BC AHS has not been linked to an increase in youth pregnancy rates. Statistics Canada data shows these rates have been continually dropping since the survey began in 1992. If you would like more information about credible scientific studies which have looked at the potential risk of asking young people sensitive questions, you can download the booklet “Is There Any Harm in Asking?” at www.mcs.bc.ca.

Parents have also expressed concerns about the number of surveys which take place in schools. The BC AHS is designed to be a comprehensive survey of health and has incorporated questions from other researchers who would otherwise be surveying in schools as well, so as to reduce the burden on students and schools.

“The Adolescent Health Survey is probably the most valuable data we have in the school district for health planning and we regularly use it with our community partners as we look at areas of strength and places we need to give additional attention.”

—Chris Kennedy, Superintendent of Schools/CEO
West Vancouver Schools

Some of the questions on the survey might not apply to your child. They can skip these questions. For example, if they have not drunk alcohol, they are instructed to skip the questions about alcohol use.

Based on previous surveys conducted over the past 25 years and the pilots for the 2018 BC AHS, it is very unlikely that a student will be upset by the survey. However, nurses administering the survey are trained to support any young person who may become upset or ask for health information. Each participant is offered a resource card with details about how to get a copy of the survey results. The card also contains local and provincial helplines and other resources they may wish to contact.

It takes us about nine months to enter and analyze all 30,000 surveys which will be completed by students across BC. In March 2019, we will publish a provincial report of the findings. This will be followed by regional reports, fact sheets and reports about special topics of interest. All of these are available to download from our website or you can email us and we will send you a paper copy.

“When Métis students complete the AHS they are contributing to the health and wellness of all Métis youth in communities across BC. The AHS results help to inform our work and prioritize areas that students identify as important.”

—Tanya Davoren, Director of Health and Sport
Métis Nation

We will be producing a number of resources for parents which can support you to discuss health issues with your child. We are also happy to come and share the results with parent groups through presentations and workshops. Popular topics we were asked to share at parent events after the last BC Adolescent Health Survey include marijuana use, concussions, mental health, technology use and peer relationships.

By participating in the survey, school districts ensure local concerns are included in provincial planning processes as the results are widely used by the BC government, health authorities and provincial agencies such as the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and Provincial Health Officer.

“The BC Adolescent Health Survey provides a wealth of detailed information about the physical, emotional and social health and well-being of adolescents in our province—something that is extremely valuable to my Office in conducting its work.”

—Bernard Richard, BC’s Representative for Children and Youth

We really hope you will support your child to take the survey and help improve services and supports for young people in BC. If you still have questions or want more information, please contact us at:

604-291-1996 or ahs@mcs.bc.ca

Or check out our website—www.mcs.bc.ca.



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