


2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey results for the Interior region of BC

McCREARY CENTRE SOCIETY





We gratefully acknowledge that the data in this report was gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Ḏákelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'át'imc, Syilx, and Ṯsilhqot'in Nations. We also acknowledge the ancestral and continuing connection to this land of the Métis Nation.

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ISBN: 978-1-998481-18-7

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Citation: Casey, E., Anderson, L., Forsyth, R., & Smith, A. (2025). *2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey results for the Interior region of BC*. McCreary Centre Society.

This study was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, University of British Columbia. H22-03063. Funding for the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey was provided by the BC Government.

Thank you to the Public Health Nurses, UBCO nursing students, and allied health professionals who administered the 2023 BC AHS in the Interior region:

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Cindy Pickering

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Key findings

Results from the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) showed that the Interior region remains less ethnically diverse than other parts of the province. However, there was an increase in youth born abroad and a decrease in those identifying their heritage as European, as well as an increase in youth who identified as a gender and/or sexual minority.

Results also showed:

- Many Interior results reflected provincial trends. For example, there was a decrease in youth who reported positive mental health (e.g., 56% rated their mental health as good or excellent vs. 71% in 2018 vs. 81% in 2013), and an increase in those who self-harmed in the past year (27% vs. 19% in 2018 vs. 17% in 2013).
- In comparison to youth across the province, Interior youth were more likely to report they lived with both their parents at different times (10% vs. 8%), and had been in foster care (3% vs. 2%). They were also more likely to have run away from home (7% vs. 5% provincially) and experienced homelessness (3% vs. 2%) in the past 12 months. However, they were less likely than local youth in previous survey years to have moved, been kicked out, or run away.
- Overall, there was a decrease in Interior youth reporting material deprivation. However there was no decrease in youth going to bed hungry, and 3% of youth had eaten food from a food bank the day before completing the survey. Also, Interior youth were more likely than those across BC to go to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home (11% vs. 9%), and to cut the size of their meals or skip meals for this reason (8% vs. 6%).
- Compared to Interior youth who participated in the BC AHS prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth in 2023 were less likely to feel connected to family, school, and their extracurricular activities. Also, they were less likely to feel safe at school, in their neighbourhood, and on public transit.
- Interior youth have traditionally been more likely than youth across BC to be sexually active and use substances. This remained the case. However, Interior youth were less likely to have had oral sex or sexual intercourse than in previous years, as well as to have tried alcohol (e.g., 50% vs. 55% in 2018) and smoked tobacco (21% vs. 26% in 2018 vs. 28% in 2013).
- Reflecting the provincial trends, there was an increase in youth who used withdrawal as their only method of contraception, as well as an increase in those who first used tobacco and alcohol at a younger age. For example, among youth who had tried alcohol, 30% first did so before their 13th birthday, compared to 26% in 2018. However, the provincial rise in youth using cannabis at an earlier age was not seen in the Interior region.
- There were some variations in the health and well-being of youth across the Interior, as well as in access to services and supports. For example, youth in the Okanagan were the most likely to have accessed health care at a walk-in clinic in the past year (e.g., 26% vs. 15% in Kootenay Boundary), and to have received sex education at school (e.g., 91% vs. 84% of Kootenay Boundary youth vs. 75% of East Kootenay youth).
- Across the Interior, males generally reported the most positive health and well-being and were the least likely to experience most types of victimization, including abuse and sexual harassment. For example, 31% of males had experienced verbal sexual harassment in the past 12 months, compared to 58% of females and 67% of non-binary youth.
- Supportive relationships can be a protective factor for youth. Interior youth were more likely than those across the province to have at least one adult in their neighbourhood or community who they felt cared about them (78% vs. 73%). Compared to 5 years earlier, youth were more likely to have supportive adults outside their family they could talk to when they were having a serious problem (38% vs. 31% in 2018).

Introduction

In spring 2023, around 38,500 young people aged 12–19 participated in the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) in 59 of BC's 60 school districts. The survey was developed in consultation with young people, parents, and other experts in youth health. It was pilot-tested with diverse young people in communities across BC before being administered across the Interior region by Public Health Nurses, UBCO nursing students, and allied health professionals.

Interior students represented 16% of the total 2023 BC AHS sample. Within the Interior, around half (49%) of the students sampled were in the Okanagan Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA), 30% were in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap HSDA, 11% were in East Kootenay HSDA, and 10% were in Kootenay Boundary HSDA.

There has always been excellent participation in the BC AHS across the region and all Interior school districts have participated in the survey since 2003. Students from Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique have participated in the last two waves of the survey.

Overall, 71% of Interior youth who participated in the BC AHS were at a school in an urban community and 29% were attending school in a rural community. Health and well-being looked similar between the two groups but a few differences of note are included in the report.

Further details about the methodology for the 2023 BC AHS are available at: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_factsheet_methodology.pdf.

2023 BC AHS participating school districts	
HSDA	School Districts
Thompson Cariboo Shuswap	Revelstoke, Cariboo-Chilcotin, Nicola-Similkameen [^] , Kamloops-Thompson, Gold Trail, North Okanagan-Shuswap [^] , Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique
Okanagan	Vernon, Central Okanagan, Okanagan Similkameen, Nicola-Similkameen [^] , Okanagan Skaha, North Okanagan-Shuswap [^] , Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique
Kootenay Boundary	Kootenay Lake [^] , Arrow Lakes, Kootenay-Columbia, Boundary, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique
East Kootenay	Southeast Kootenay, Rocky Mountain, Kootenay Lake [^] , Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique

[^]School district had schools in two HSDAs.

This report provides a health profile of youth in Grades 7–12 in the Interior region. It includes comparisons to results across the province, and within the region, as well as comparisons to results over the past decade. It also includes grade and gender comparisons.

The terms 'male,' 'female,' and 'non-binary' are used to describe the three gender categories used in the analysis. These terms reflect the preference of BC youth who participated in discussions about terminology, and for whom the terms 'boys' and 'girls' did not resonate. Non-binary youth include those who did not identify as male or female or were not yet sure of their gender identity.

Limitations

The 2023 BC AHS is considered representative of 97.6% of BC youth aged 12–19 who were attending mainstream schools in the province. However, it may not be representative of all youth in this age range. For example, the BC AHS does not include students who were absent on the day the survey was administered, had a health or learning challenge which prevented them from completing the survey, were attending independent schools, or were home-schooled.

Using this report

All reported comparisons and associations within the Interior and between the Interior and the province are statistically significant at $p < .01$. This means there is less than a 1% likelihood that the results occurred by chance. Comparisons to previous survey years are statistically significant at $p < .05$, which means there is less than a 5% likelihood these results occurred by chance.

Where it is not obvious, differences in tables or charts that are not statistically significant are noted.

Results are presented to the nearest rounded percentage, which may mean they do not always total 100%.

The terms 'youth' and 'student' are used interchangeably to refer to BC AHS participants aged 12–19.

Quotes from youth in the Interior region who participated in the 2023 BC AHS are included throughout the report.

To read the HSDA level reports for Thompson Cariboo Shuswap, Okanagan, Kootenay Boundary, and East Kootenay, and to access other BC AHS resources, please visit mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs.



Profile of youth

Family background

The most common background of youth in the Interior region was European. However, this percentage has decreased over the past decade (e.g., 59% vs. 72% in 2013). Within the Interior, youth in Kootenay Boundary were the most likely to be of European heritage (e.g., 68% vs. 60% of Okanagan youth).

Youth were more likely than those across BC to identify as European (59% vs. 43%) and Indigenous (18% vs. 10%), and to not know their background (21% vs. 12%). They were less likely to identify as East Asian (4% vs. 17% provincially), South Asian (4% vs. 13%), Southeast Asian (3% vs. 8%), African (2% vs. 3%), and Middle Eastern (1% vs. 4%).

Family background		
	2018	2023
European	65%	59%
Indigenous	18%	18%
Latin American, South American, Central American	4%	5%
East Asian	5%	4%
South Asian	3%	4%
Southeast Asian	2%	3%
African	2%	2%
Australian, Pacific Islander	2%	2%
Caribbean	N/A	1%
Middle Eastern	1%	1%
Other	3%	5%
Don't know	16%	21%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.
 N/A: The response option was not included in the 2018 BC AHS.
 Note: For 'Latin/South/Central American' and 'East Asian' the difference between 2018 and 2023 was not statistically significant.

Indigenous youth

In the Interior, 18% of youth identified as Indigenous. Among these youth:

- 54% identified as First Nations, 43% as Métis, 2% as Inuit, and 6% as another Indigenous background (they could mark all that applied).
- 33% could speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language (vs. 26% in 2018), including 2% who could have a conversation or were fluent.
- 5% identified as Two-Spirit.
- 10% previously lived on reserve and 14% were currently living on reserve.

Almost half of Indigenous youth (48%) reported that a family member had been in residential school, including at least one of their parents (2%), grandparents (29%), and other relatives (30%). This is likely an under-representation as 37% of Indigenous youth did not know their family history of residential school.

The percentage of youth who identified as Indigenous ranged from 15% in the Okanagan and Kootenay Boundary to 22% in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap. Indigenous youth in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap were the most likely to have ever lived on reserve (e.g., 37% vs. 21% in the Okanagan vs. 8% in Kootenay Boundary), and to be able to speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language (e.g., 45% vs. 31% in the Okanagan vs. 18% in East Kootenay).

An in-depth look at the health and well-being of Indigenous youth who completed the BC AHS will be published in 2025 by McCreary's Young Indigenous Research Team (YIRT).

Racial identity and religious affiliation

The 2023 BC AHS asked youth about their racial identity. Youth in the Interior were more likely than their peers across BC to identify as White and Indigenous, and were less likely to identify as Asian, Black, Latin American/Hispanic, mixed background, or another way.

Racial identity		
	Interior	BC
White	82%	57%
Indigenous	10%	6%
Asian	8%	31%
Black	3%	3%
Latin American/Hispanic	3%	4%
Mixed background	4%	6%
Other	2%	5%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied. Some youth of mixed racial backgrounds chose a single racial identity, while others selected more than one identity, and/or selected the option 'mixed background'.

Around 6 in 10 youth did not identify with any religion (58% vs. 48% provincially), and 9% did not know their religion (vs. 8%). Compared to the province as a whole, youth in the Interior were more likely to identify with Traditional (Indigenous) spirituality (just over 2% vs. just under 2% provincially). They were less likely to identify as Sikh (2% vs. 8%), Buddhist (1% vs. 3%), Muslim (1% vs. 4%), and Hindu (1% vs. 2%).

Religious affiliation	
Christian	23%
Sikh	2%
Traditional (Indigenous) spirituality	2%
Buddhist	1%
Muslim	1%
Hindu	1%
Jewish	1%
Other	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

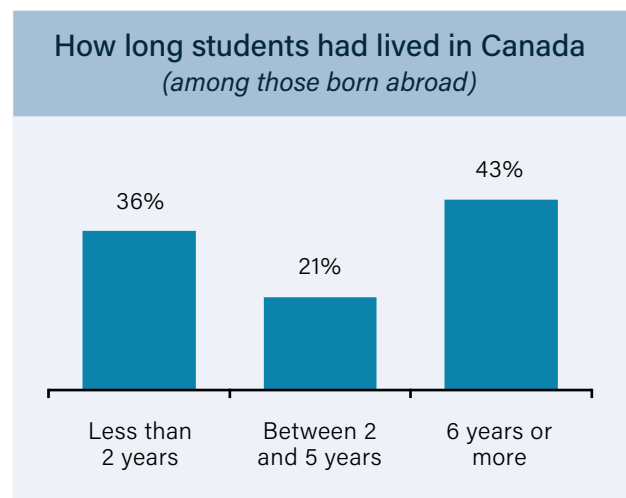
Time in Canada

There was a decrease in Interior youth who were born in Canada (89% vs. 90% in 2018 vs. 92% in 2013), and an increase in those who arrived in the country as international students (e.g., 4% vs. 3% in 2018) and as refugees (1% vs. <1% in 2018 and 2013).

Immigration		
	Interior	BC
Born in Canada	89%	77%
Born abroad and now a permanent resident or Canadian citizen	6%	13%
Arrived in Canada as an international student	4%	8%
Arrived in Canada as a refugee	1%	2%

As in previous survey years, the percentage of youth born in Canada was higher than across BC (89% vs. 77%). Across the region, Okanagan youth were the least likely to have been born in Canada (86% vs. 91% in each of the other three HSDAs).

Among youth born abroad, there was an increase from a decade earlier in the percentage who had lived in Canada for less than 2 years (36% vs. 28% in 2013). The percentage who had arrived in the past 2 years was higher than across BC (vs. 30%).



Gender identity and sexual orientation

“I experience gender dysphoria and it affects the things I do.”

14-year-old youth

“I use she/they so I’m not fully non-binary but also not a girl!”

16-year-old youth

“My parents don’t know I’m bisexual!”

12-year-old youth

In the Interior, 50% of youth identified as male, 45% as female, and 5% as non-binary (an increase from 3% in 2018). For 94% of youth, their gender identity matched their sex assigned at birth (vs. 97% in 2018).

Reflecting the provincial pattern, there was a decrease in the percentage of youth who identified their sexual orientation as straight (e.g., 76% vs. 83% in 2018) and an increase in those who identified as a sexual minority (e.g., 3% identified as gay or lesbian vs. 1% in 2018).

Sexual orientation	
Straight	76%
Mostly straight	6%
Bisexual or pansexual	10%
Gay or lesbian	3%
Asexual	1%
Not sure	4%
Other	<1%

Males were the most likely to identify as straight and non-binary youth were the least likely (89% of males vs. 69% of females vs. 4% of non-binary youth).

An in-depth look at the health and well-being of gender minority youth in BC has been published in partnership with the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC). View the report at: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2024_gender_diverse_report.pdf.

A report about sexual minority youth health will also be published.



Home life

“Growing up with divorced parents all my life has put a strain on my ability to participate in the activities I want to.”

16-year-old youth

Compared to 5 years earlier, youth were less likely to be living in households with their siblings/stepsiblings (64% vs. 68% in 2018). They were more likely to live with their grandparents (10% vs. 8% in 2018), adult relatives other than their parents and grandparents (4% vs. 2%), and alone (1% vs. <1%).

Interior youth were less likely than those across BC to live mostly with their mother/stepmother (87% vs. 89%), siblings/stepsiblings (64% vs. 68%), grandparents (10% vs. 14%), and adult relatives other than their parents and grandparents (4% vs. 5%). They were more likely to be living with both their parents at different times (10% vs. 8% provincially).

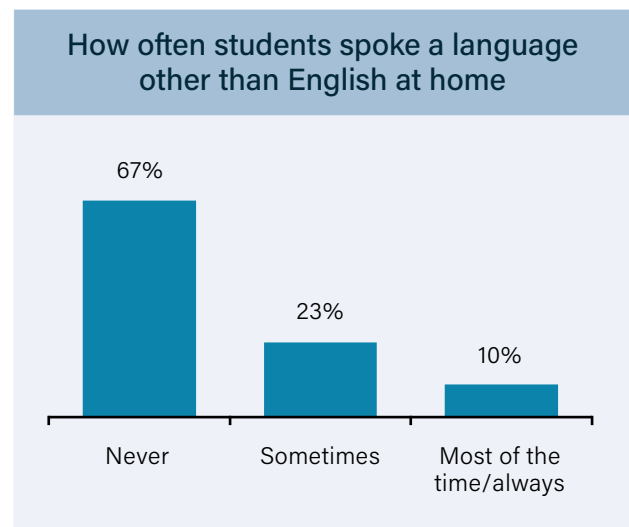
Who youth lived with most of the time	
Mother/stepmother	87%
Father/stepfather	78%
Two mothers or two fathers	1%
Sibling(s)/stepsibling(s)	64%
Grandparent(s)	10%
Foster parent(s)	1%
Their own child or children	<1%
Other adults related to them	4%
Other adults not related to them	2%
Other children or youth	2%
Lived alone	1%
Lived with both parents at different times	10%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Language spoken at home

A third of youth (33%) spoke a language other than English at home at least some of the time (vs. 54% provincially). The percentage who spoke a language other than English at home most or all of the time was higher than in previous survey years (e.g., 10% vs. 7% in 2018).

Within the Interior, Okanagan youth were the most likely to speak a language other than English at home most or all of the time (e.g., 12% vs. 8% of Thompson Cariboo Shuswap youth).

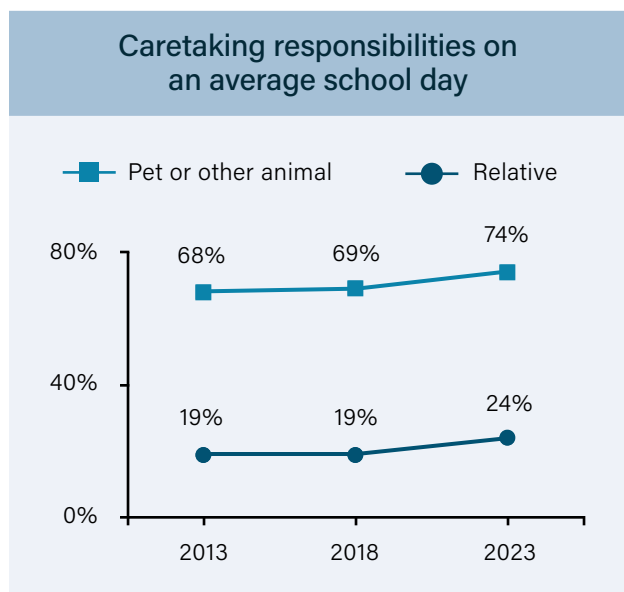


Caretaking responsibilities

“My mom was diagnosed with cancer and it was hard for my parents, myself, and my siblings. I had to take care of the rest of my siblings.”

14-year-old youth

On an average school day, 24% of youth took care of a relative (e.g., a relative with a disability, or their younger siblings), and 74% took care of a pet or other animal. Both of these rates were higher than in previous survey years.



Note: The difference between 2013 and 2018 for taking care of a pet or other animal was not statistically significant.

Compared to youth across BC, Interior youth were less likely to have caretaking responsibilities for a relative (24% vs. 26%), and were more likely to look after a pet or other animal (74% vs. 57%).

Males were less likely than females to have caretaking responsibilities for a relative (21% vs. 26%), and were the least likely to take care of an animal (e.g., 70% vs. 77% of non-binary youth).

Government care experience

“I got turned away from a youth agreement because ‘my mom has a bedroom for me!’”

17-year-old youth

Youth had experienced various types of government care (including through an Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency), as well as alternatives to government care, such as a Youth Agreement.

Types of care youth had experienced		
	In the past year	Ever
Extended Family Program or Out of Care Order	2%	4%
Foster home	1%	3%
Youth Agreement	1%	2%
Group home	1%	2%
Custody centre/ detention centre	1%	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Interior youth were more likely than those across the province to have ever been in the Extended Family Program (4% vs. 3%) and a foster home (3% vs. 2%).

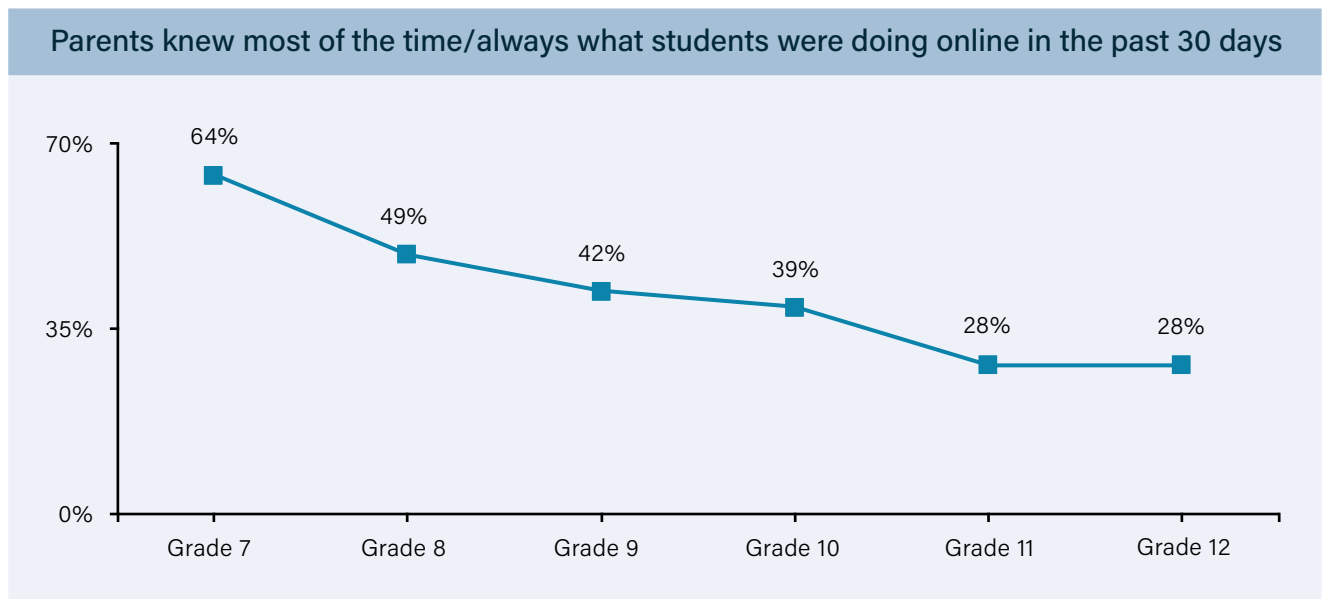
McCreary’s Youth Research Academy (YRA) will be releasing a report in 2025 considering the health and well-being of youth with care experience.

Parental monitoring

Youth were more likely to report that their parents monitored their free time than their time online. However, they were less likely than those 5 years earlier to feel their parents monitored their free time most or all the time (71% vs. 76% in 2018).

As might be expected, youth in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to feel their parents knew what they were doing online most or all of the time.

In the past 30 days, how much youth felt their parents knew what they were doing ...			
	Never/rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time/always
With their free time	13%	16%	71%
Online	39%	20%	42%



Note: The difference between Grade 9 and Grade 10 was not statistically significant.

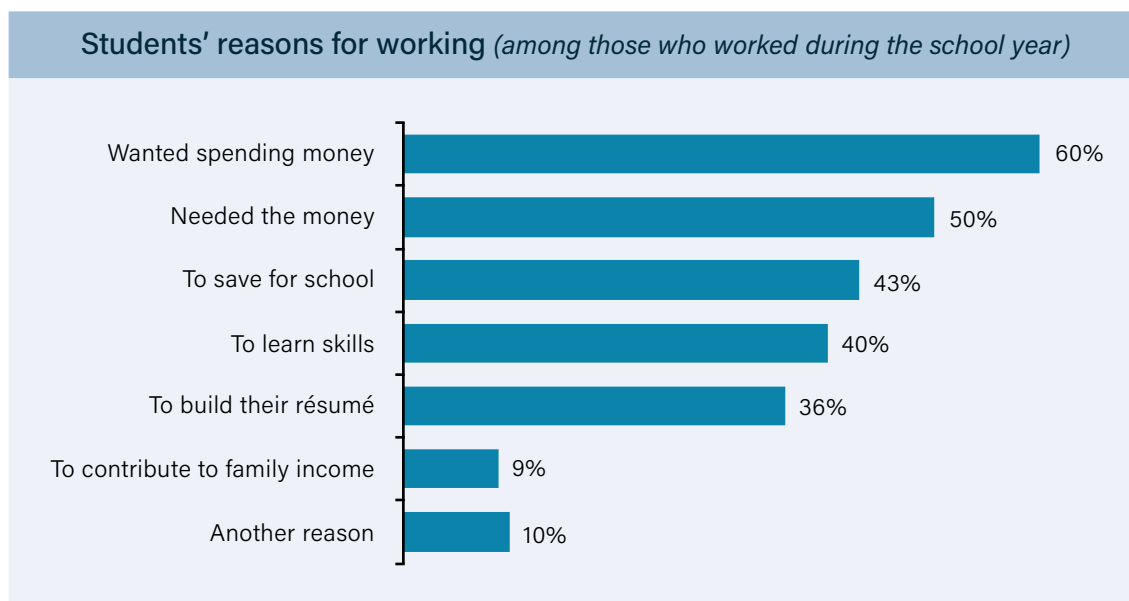
Economic well-being

Employment

Reflecting results 5 years earlier, 42% of students worked at a paid job during the school year (vs. 38% in 2013). Youth were more likely than those across the province to work (42% vs. 32%), and rates ranged from 39% in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap to 47% in Kootenay Boundary.

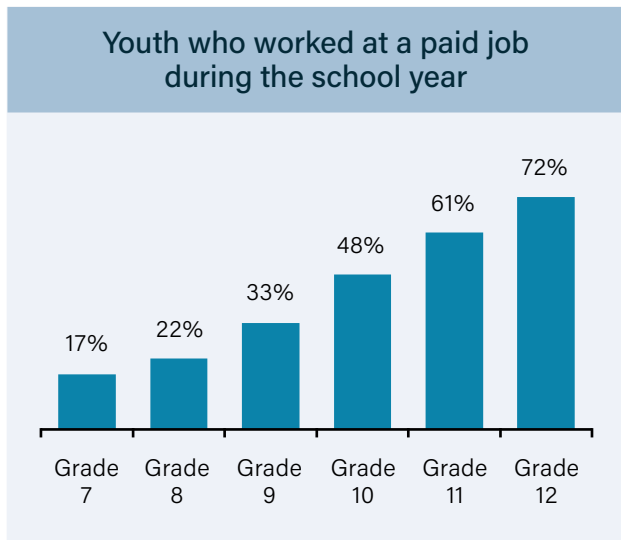
Youth most commonly worked 5 to 12 hours a week (17%), 10% worked less than 5 hours, 11% worked 13 to 20 hours, and 4% worked 21 or more hours each week (vs. 2% across BC). Males were more likely than females to work in excess of 20 hours a week (4% vs. 3%).

The majority of youth reported they worked because they wanted spending money. However, 9% worked to contribute to their family's income (vs. 12% provincially).



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

As might be expected, youth in higher grades were more likely than those in lower grades to have worked at a paid job during the school year, and to have worked 21 or more hours per week (e.g., 8% of Grade 12s vs. 2% of Grade 9s).



Note: The difference between Grade 7 and Grade 8 was not statistically significant.

Unstable housing

"I don't want to live here anymore and I just wanna move out [and] live alone."

16-year-old youth

"I didn't have the best family situation which led to living at my grandparents."

17-year-old youth

The percentage of youth who ran away from home in the past year decreased from 12% in 2013, to 9% in 2018, to 7%. Youth were also less likely than 5 years earlier to have been kicked out (4% vs. 7% in 2018). However, Interior youth were more likely than those across BC to have run away from home (7% vs. 5%). They were also more likely to have experienced homelessness (3% vs. 2% provincially) in the past 12 months.

Interior youth were less likely than in previous survey years to have moved at least once in the past 12 months (e.g., 18% vs. 25% in 2018) and to have done so three or more times (e.g., 3% vs. 6% in 2018).

Most youth (92%) often or always felt safe in their home (vs. 94% in 2018). However, 3% rarely or never felt safe there. Males were the most likely to feel often or always safe in their home (94% vs. 92% of females vs. 78% of non-binary youth).



Material deprivation

Youth in the Interior helped McCreary to develop a Youth Deprivation Index for the 2018 BC AHS. They also reviewed the Index to determine if it was still relevant ahead of the 2023 survey. At that time, they confirmed that the original 10 items included in the Index still captured deprivation from a youth’s perspective but also indicated the need for the addition of an 11th item—personal hygiene products.

Most youth in the Interior had each of the items in the Index. However, 14% lacked but wished they had one item, 5% lacked two items, and 5% lacked three or more items. The percentage who felt deprived of at least one item decreased from 26% in 2018 to 24%. Findings were consistent with and without the addition of the 11th item, and were similar across the four Interior HSDAs.

There were some changes from 5 years earlier in the percentage of youth who felt deprived of specific items. In 2023, they were more likely to report feeling deprived of money to spend on themselves and clothes to fit in. They were less likely to report not having but wanting money for school supplies, school trips, and extracurricular activities; a smartphone; access to transportation; and access to the Internet.

Food security

In the past 12 months, 8% of youth cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food (vs. 6% provincially). Also, 11% went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home (vs. 9% provincially), including 2% who did so often or always.

Provincially, there was a decrease in the percentage of youth who went to bed hungry at least sometimes (from 10% in 2018 to 9%). This was not the case in the Interior, as the percentage was similar to 2018 and higher than a decade earlier (11% vs. 9% in 2013).

Similar to the provincial rate, 3% of youth had eaten food from a food bank the day before completing the survey. Kootenay Boundary youth were twice as likely as those in the Okanagan to have eaten food from a food bank that day (4% vs. 2%).

Youth who lacked but wished they had ...

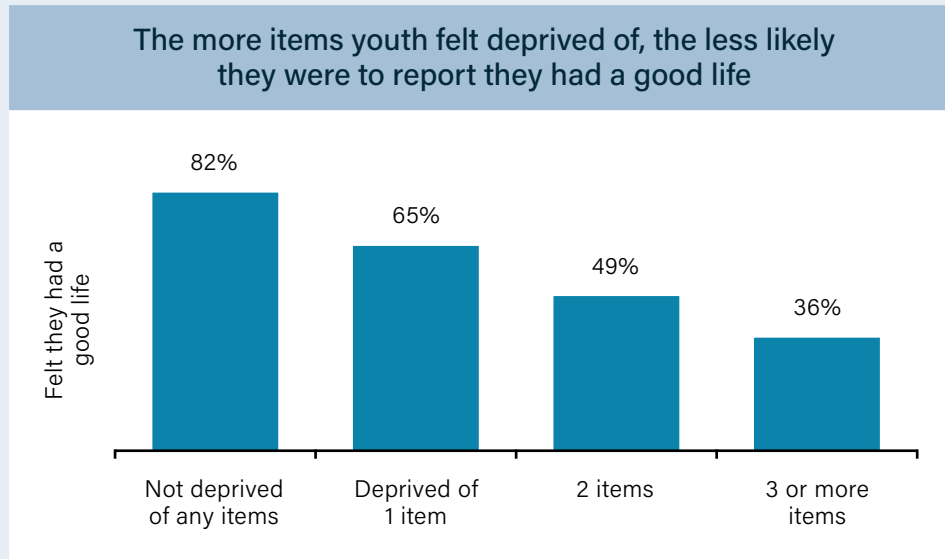
	2018	2023
Money to spend on themselves	11%	13%
Lunch for school/money to buy lunch	5%	5%
Space of their own to hang out in	5%	5%
Clothes to fit in	2%	4%
Money for school supplies, school trips, and extracurricular activities	5%	4%
A smartphone	6%	3%
Equipment/clothes for extracurricular activities	3%	3%
Access to transportation	3%	3%
A quiet place to sleep	2%	2%
Access to the Internet	1%	1%
Personal hygiene products (e.g., soap, deodorant)	N/A	1%

Note: Youth in 2023 were less likely than in those in 2018 to feel deprived of ‘access to transportation’ and ‘access to the Internet.’

N/A: The item was not included on the 2018 BC AHS.

The importance of economic well-being

Youth who experience poorer economic well-being are less likely than their peers to report positive health. For example, the more items from the Youth Deprivation Index that youth felt deprived of, the less likely they were to report good or excellent mental health, satisfaction with their life, and hopefulness.

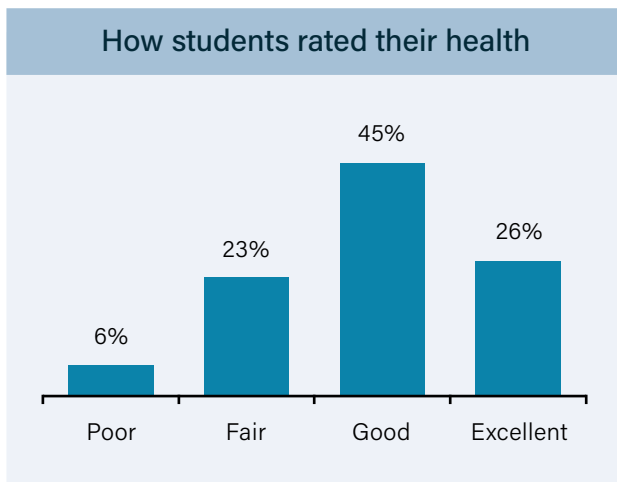


Similarly, youth who went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food were less likely than those who never went to bed hungry to report good or excellent overall health (45% vs. 75%). They were also more likely to experience extreme stress in the past month (31% vs. 12%), and to use substances such as opioids, which can be an appetite suppressor (4% had used heroin, fentanyl, or other opioids vs. 1% of youth who never went to bed hungry).

Physical health

Health ratings

Most youth rated their health positively. However, there was a decrease in those who rated their health as good or excellent (71% vs. 80% in 2018 vs. 87% in 2013). Positive health ratings were similar across all four Interior HSDAs.



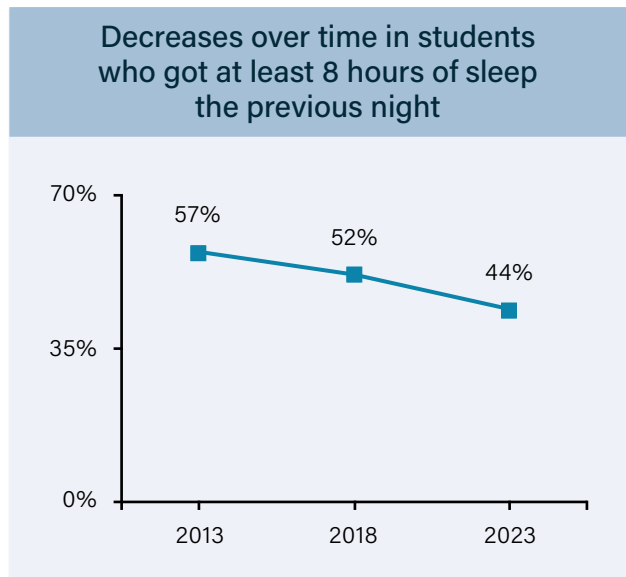
Males were the most likely to rate their health as good or excellent (80% vs. 65% of females vs. 40% of non-binary youth).

Sleep

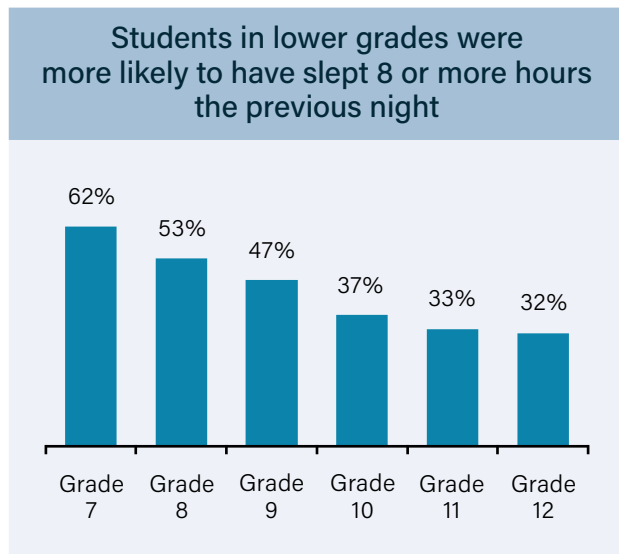
"I occasionally have sleep problems and I really get affected if I don't get enough sleep."

18-year-old youth

The night before completing the survey, 44% of youth across the Interior slept for at least 8 hours, and 18% slept 5 hours or less. Youth were less likely to have slept for 8 or more hours than in previous survey years, but were more likely to get this much sleep than youth across BC (42% provincially).



Older students were generally less likely than younger ones to get at least 8 hours of sleep.



Note: The differences between Grades 10–12 were not statistically significant.

Most youth were able to sleep undisturbed the previous night. However, 28% reported that their sleep was interrupted.

Most students engaged in at least one activity after they were expected to be asleep, and fewer than 1 in 10 (9%) went offline and did not engage in any activities (e.g., they put their phone on silent, turned it off, or put it in another room).

Activities youth engaged in after they were expected to be asleep

Scrolling through social media	69%
Chatting or texting	61%
Doing homework	41%
Gaming (other than esports)	29%
Playing/watching esports	19%
Doing other things online (e.g., watching videos)	65%

There were some gender differences in the activities youth engaged in after they were expected to be asleep. For example, females were the most likely to do homework (e.g., 51% vs. 36% of non-binary youth), and were the least likely to game (e.g., 17% vs. 40% of males). Males were the most likely to play or watch esports (e.g., 29% vs. 10% of non-binary youth).



Health conditions and disabilities

(Mental health conditions are discussed in the [Mental health and well-being](#) section).

Reflecting the provincial trend, there was a decrease in youth who reported having a long-term or chronic medical condition (8% vs. 10% in 2018 vs. 12% in 2013), and an increase in those with a learning disability (e.g., 9% vs. 5% in 2018).

Health conditions and disabilities	
A learning disability (e.g., dyslexia)	9%
A long-term/chronic medical condition	8%
Deaf or hard of hearing	2%
Blind or visual impairment which cannot be corrected with glasses/contact lenses	2%
A physical disability (e.g., cerebral palsy, use a wheelchair)	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among youth with a health condition or disability, 31% did not experience any barriers because of their condition, 50% had what they needed to overcome the barriers they experienced, and 20% did not have what they needed to overcome these barriers. Results were similar between the four Interior HSDAs, and in comparison to the province.

Injuries

“[I would like to learn more about] how to cope/exercise with injuries and not hurt yourself further.”

13-year-old youth

“I had to visit the ER due to ski incident.”

12-year-old youth

In the past 12 months, 38% of youth had been injured seriously enough to need medical attention, with similar rates in each of the four Interior HSDAs. This was an increase from 30% in 2018 and higher than the provincial rate (33% in 2023). Males were more likely than females to have experienced a serious injury (40% vs. 36%).

Youth were also asked specifically if they had experienced a concussion during the past year (i.e., a head injury that was so serious they lost consciousness, were dazed, confused, or suffered a gap in memory). Around 1 in 5 (21%) had experienced a concussion. This was a return to the 2013 rate after a decrease to 17% in 2018.

The percentages who experienced a concussion were similar across the region. However, youth in the Interior were more likely to have experienced a concussion than those across BC (21% vs. 15% provincially).



When asked what they were doing when they got their most serious concussion, youth most commonly reported they were playing or training for organized sports.

How youth got their most serious concussion in the past 12 months (among those who had been concussed)	
Playing/training for organized sports	36%
Playing recreational sports (without a coach)	17%
Using alcohol or other substances	12%
Riding a bike	12%
Fighting with another person	8%
Riding/driving in a motor vehicle	8%
Working	6%
Skateboarding	6%
Other	22%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Males were more likely than females to have experienced a concussion (22% vs. 19%). There were also some gender differences in how youth got their most serious concussion. For example, among those who were concussed in the past year, males were more likely than females to have been riding a bike (17% vs. 6%), and females were more likely than males to have been using alcohol or other substances (18% vs. 9%).

Among youth who had experienced a concussion in the past 12 months, 41% received medical treatment for their most serious head injury, which was comparable to the provincial rate, and across all four Interior HSDAs.

Access to health care

"[I] need a speech pathologist."

14-year-old youth

"I feel like students should get a checkup once a week by a medical health doctor."

12-year-old youth

In the past 12 months, 23% of youth reported they had not needed to access health care (28% of males vs. 18% of females). During this time, 3% of youth reported that they had not been able to get the care they needed. This percentage was lower than in 2018 (4%), and similar to the province and across the four local HSDAs.

Youth who did access health care most commonly saw a family doctor. However, the percentage who did so decreased from 5 years earlier (53% vs. 60% in 2018), as did the percentage who accessed a walk-in clinic (21% vs. 31%) and a traditional healer (just under 1% vs. just over 1%).

Where youth got health care in the past 12 months	
Family doctor	53%
Specialist (e.g., dermatologist, psychiatrist)	29%
Walk-in clinic	21%
Emergency room (ER)	20%
Counsellor/psychologist	14%
Nurse	10%
Youth clinic	2%
School wellness centre	2%
Foundry centre/Foundry Virtual BC	2%
Traditional healer	1%
Other	4%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

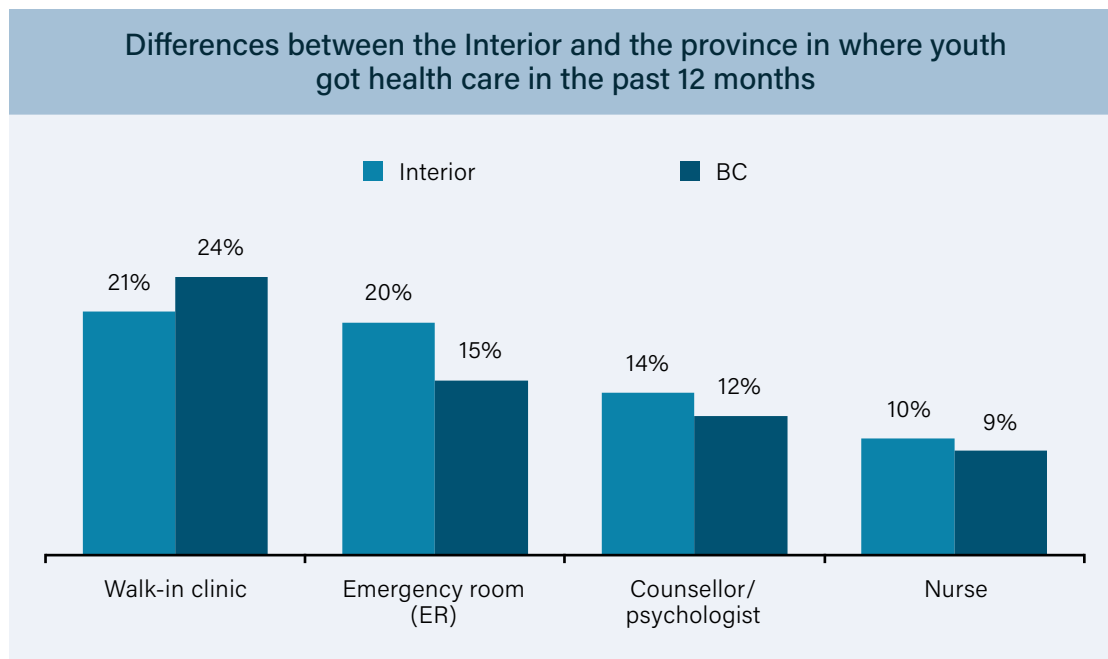
There were some differences between where youth in the Okanagan accessed health care in the past 12 months, and where other youth in the Interior got care. For example, Okanagan youth were the most likely to access a walk-in clinic (e.g., 26% vs. 15% in Kootenay Boundary), and were less likely than Thompson Cariboo Shuswap and Kootenay Boundary youth to have accessed an emergency room (e.g., 18% vs. 24% in Kootenay Boundary).

Compared to the province as a whole, youth in the Interior were less likely to have accessed a walk-in clinic, and were more likely to have visited an emergency room, counsellor or psychologist, and a nurse.

“Schools should have contact numbers of cheap dentists for people that cannot afford/international students.”

18-year-old youth

Most youth (83%) had been to a dentist within the past 12 months, 10% last went to the dentist 12–24 months ago, and 5% had last been more than 2 years ago. Comparable to the provincial rate, 2% of youth had never been to the dentist.



Note: Youth in the Interior were less likely than those across BC to have accessed a youth clinic.

Youth were asked if they had needed medical treatment in the past 12 months because they were physically sick or hurt. The majority (59%) had not needed treatment; and among those who had needed treatment, most (81%) got the care they needed.

Exercise

Youth were asked about their participation in physical activity sufficient to make them sweat, breathe hard, or 'be out of breath'. (Engagement in sports and other extracurricular physical activity is discussed in the **Recreational activities** section.)

Most youth (92%) got at least an hour of moderate to vigorous exercise in the past week. Exercise rates were similar across the Interior, except youth in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap were more likely than those in Kootenay Boundary to exercise on all 7 days in the past week (24% vs. 20%).

Number of days in the past week youth got at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise

0 days	8%
1 day	6%
2 days	9%
3 days	13%
4 days	14%
5 days	17%
6 days	10%
All 7 days	22%

The latest Canadian guidelines for physical activity recommend that youth aged 12–17 do an hour of moderate to vigorous activity every day, and those aged 18 and older get at least 2.5 hours of this type of exercise per week.

Among youth aged 12–17, 22% engaged in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise every day in the past week (vs. 19% provincially). Rates of exercising daily were similar to 2018 and higher than in 2013 (18%). Males in this age range were the most likely to have exercised daily (30% vs. 16% of females vs. 10% of non-binary youth).

Among youth aged 18 and older, 65% participated in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise on at least 3 days in the past week. Males were the most likely to exercise this frequently (e.g., 75% vs. 60% of females).

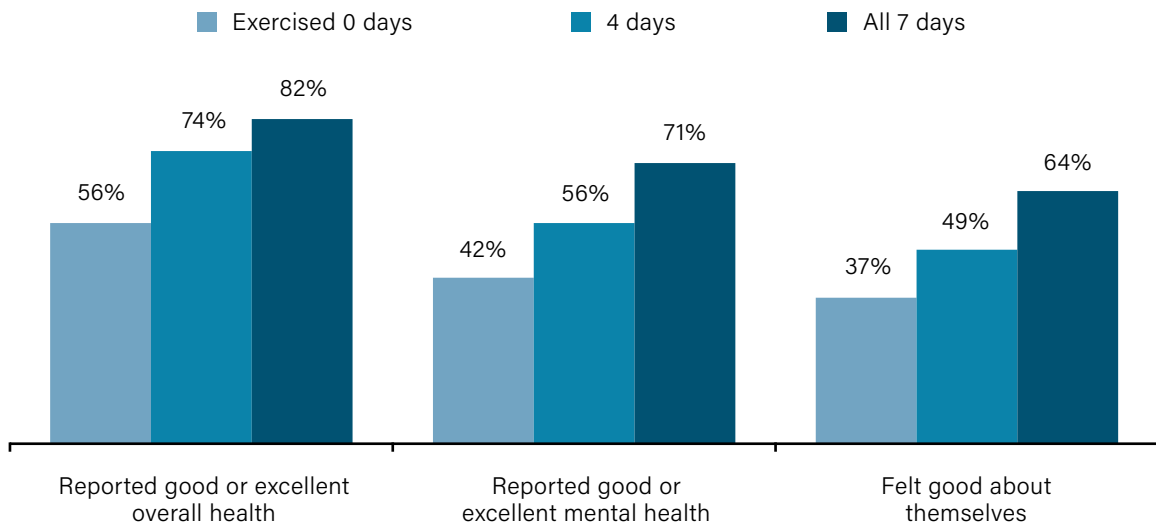
Most youth (90%) reported that they enjoyed exercising and being physically active at least somewhat, including 39% who enjoyed exercising very much.



The importance of engaging in health promoting behaviours

Youth who engage in health-promoting behaviours are more likely to experience positive mental health and life satisfaction. For example, youth who slept for at least 8 hours the night before completing the survey were more likely to report good or excellent mental health (74% vs. 43% of those who slept fewer hours). Also, the more regularly youth exercised, the more likely they were to report positive health and well-being.

The more days students exercised in the past week, the more likely they were to report positive health and well-being



Note: Exercise refers to engaging in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise.

Eating behaviours and body image

Meals and snacks

“I do not have enough time to prepare food in the morning. I go through the day without eating a lot of the time.”

15-year-old youth

Compared to 5 and 10 years earlier, the percentage of youth who ate fruit, vegetables, or salad the day before they participated in the BC AHS decreased (e.g., 86% vs. 94% in 2018), while the percentage who ate traditional food from their background increased (e.g., 24% vs. 21% in 2018). Also, the percentage who drank energy drinks more than doubled (e.g., 18% vs. 7% in 2018).

Compared to youth across BC, local youth were less likely to have eaten traditional food from their background (24% vs. 42% provincially), and were more likely to have consumed energy drinks (18% vs. 15%).

Within the Interior, youth in East Kootenay were the least likely to have eaten traditional food (e.g., 18% vs. 23% of Thompson Cariboo Shuswap youth).

Most youth in the Interior ate food prepared by their parent or caregiver the day before taking the survey (rates ranged from 79% in East Kootenay to 84% in Kootenay Boundary). East Kootenay youth were the least likely to have eaten food they prepared themselves (e.g., 65% vs. 70% of Thompson Cariboo Shuswap youth). The percentage of youth who ate food from a restaurant, food court, or delivery service ranged from 25% in East Kootenay to 35% in the Okanagan.

Source of students' meals and snacks yesterday	
Prepared by parent/caregiver	80%
Prepared themselves	69%
Restaurant, food court, or delivery service	32%
Taken home from a school food program	6%
Food bank	3%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Around three quarters (77%) of youth ate dinner every day in the past week but fewer ate breakfast and lunch this regularly.

	Meals eaten in the past 7 days				
	0 days	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-6 days	All 7 days
Breakfast	18%	19%	12%	13%	38%
Lunch	7%	13%	15%	17%	48%
Dinner	1%	3%	7%	13%	77%

There was an increase in the percentage of students who did not eat breakfast on school days, and decreases in those who ate breakfast at home, at school, and on the way to school. Results were similar to the province and across the Interior.

Where youth got breakfast on school days		
	2018	2023
Didn't eat breakfast on school days	18%	33%
At home	77%	63%
At school	10%	8%
On the way to school	8%	6%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Younger students were the most likely to eat their breakfast at home (e.g., 72% of Grade 7s vs. 59% of Grade 11s and 12s), and the least likely to report not eating breakfast on school days (e.g., 26% of Grade 7s vs. 34% of Grade 10s).

Disordered eating

"[I would like to learn more about] eating disorders and healing relationship with food."

16-year-old youth

"I've had anorexia, BED [Binge Eating Disorder], and bulimia."

17-year-old youth

In the past 30 days, 31% of youth worried that they had lost control of how much they ate.

Similar to the provincial picture, there was an increase in youth who vomited on purpose after eating (purged) in the past 12 months (17% vs. 13% in 2018 vs. 8% in 2013), including those who did so at least weekly (2% vs. 1% in 2018).

Female and non-binary youth were more likely than males to have purged in the past 12 months (e.g., 20% of females vs. 12% of males), including on a weekly basis (e.g., 5% of non-binary youth vs. 1% of males).

Body satisfaction

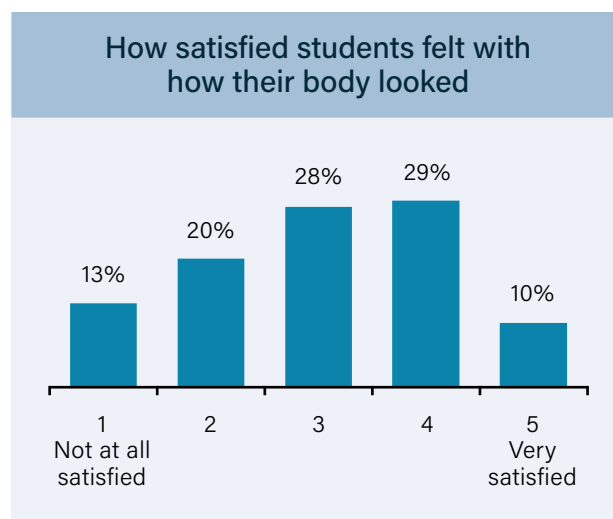
"[I would like to learn more about] body image."

16-year-old youth

"Body image is a big thing that I struggle with and I believe many others struggle with due to societal pressures and social media."

16-year-old youth

Youth were asked to rate how satisfied they were with how their body looked. Males were the most likely and non-binary youth the least likely to be satisfied with how their body looked. For example, 49% of males rated their body satisfaction as a 4 or 5 out of 5, compared to 31% of females and 17% of non-binary youth.



Mental health and well-being

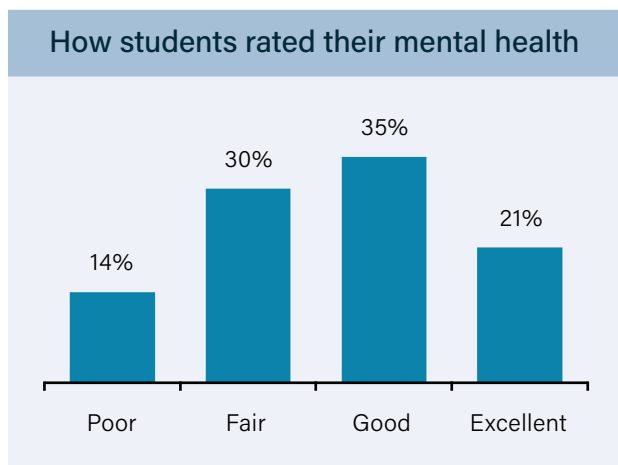
“More awareness around mental health is needed.”

17-year-old youth

“My mental health could use some work if I am completely honest.”

17-year-old youth

The majority of youth rated their mental health positively, with similar ratings in each of the Interior HSDAs. However, there was a decrease in those who rated their mental health as good or excellent (56% vs. 71% in 2018 vs. 81% in 2013).



There were gender and grade differences in mental health ratings. For example:

- 70% of males rated their mental health as good or excellent vs. 45% of females vs. 19% of non-binary youth.
- 69% of Grade 7s rated their mental health as good or excellent vs. 56% of Grade 9s vs. 50% of Grade 11s.

Quality of life

Youth generally indicated having a good life and that their life was going well, and a minority wished they had a different life. However, they were less likely than those 5 years earlier to rate their quality of life positively. Quality of life ratings were similar within the Interior.

Youth who agreed/strongly agreed ...		
	2018	2023
They had a good life	79%	76%
Their life was going well	74%	65%
They had what they wanted in life	60%	53%
Their life was going just right	57%	51%
They wished they had a different life	16%	19%

The majority of youth (58%) felt happy most or all of the time in the past month, and 12% rarely or never felt happy. Rates of feeling happy most or all the time were similar across the Interior, but decreased from 64% in 2018 and 69% in 2013.

Over two thirds of males (69%) felt happy most or all of the time, compared to 50% of females and 25% of non-binary youth.

Self-confidence and sense of competence

"[I am really good at] acting, cooking, helping other people, being nice to people."

13-year-old youth

"[I am really good at] barrel racing, soccer, hockey, fixing things, working, keeping people calm when something bad has happened."

13-year-old youth

"Je suis très bon à les arts (dessiner, le théâtre, écrire, ect.)" ["I am good at the arts (drawing, theatre, writing, etc)."]

14-year-old youth

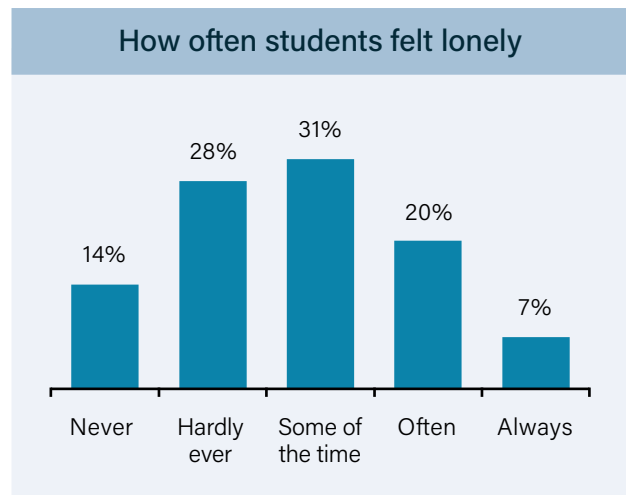
Half of Interior youth (50%) felt good about themselves (vs. 59% in 2018), and 74% could identify something they were good at (vs. 81% in 2018). They commonly listed being good at sports (e.g., archery, hiking, baseball, biking/dirt biking, hockey, horseback riding, swimming); the arts (e.g., fine arts, writing, acting, music, dancing); academics (e.g., specific school subjects such as math and science); relational skills (e.g., being a good friend, having empathy, leadership skills, caretaking responsibilities); the trades (e.g., mechanics, metal working); cooking/baking; hunting; fishing; and technology (e.g., coding, programming, playing video games).

Loneliness

"I have various thoughts of self-loathing and loneliness."

16-year-old youth

Across the Interior, 27% of youth often or always felt lonely (vs. 24% provincially).



Stress and despair

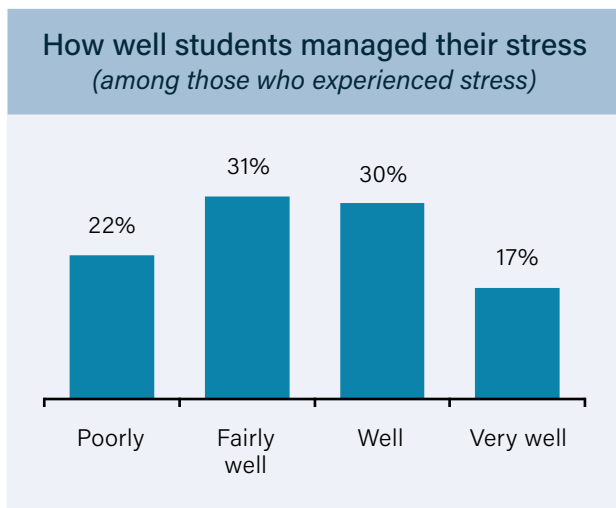
“I would like to learn more about how to help reduce stress.”

13-year-old youth

Most youth (88%) experienced at least a little stress in the past month, including 14% who were so stressed they could not function properly. The percentage of youth who experienced extreme stress increased from 12% in 2018 and 10% in 2013.

Students in higher grades were more likely than those in lower grades to experience extreme stress (e.g., 22% of Grade 12s vs. 14% of Grade 10s vs. 7% of Grade 7s).

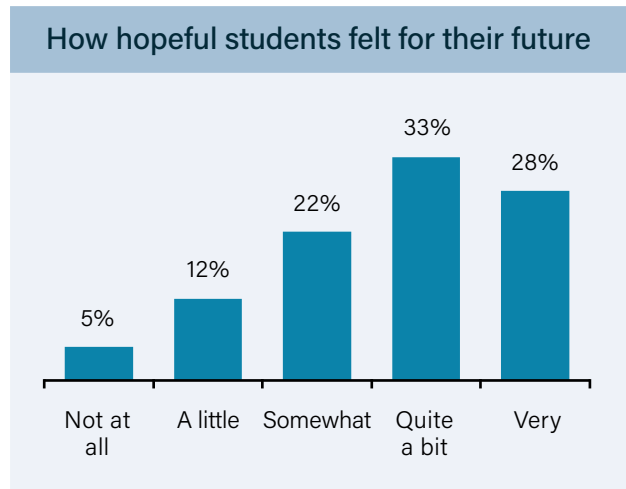
Compared to 5 years earlier, youth who experienced stress were less likely to feel they managed their stress well or very well (48% vs. 53% in 2018). This pattern was also seen provincially and within each HSDA in the region.



In the past month, the majority of youth (62%) experienced some level of despair, including 8% who felt so sad, hopeless, or discouraged that they wondered if anything was worthwhile. The percentage who experienced extreme despair was similar across the Interior, and to previous survey years.

Hopefulness

The majority of youth (61%) felt quite or very hopeful for their future. However, the percentage who felt this way was lower than 5 years earlier (69% in 2018).



Self-harm and suicidality

"I have friends that are cutting themselves and it's hard to deal with that while also being suicidal."

13-year-old youth

In the past year, 27% of youth had cut or injured themselves on purpose without trying to kill themselves (vs. 24% provincially), including 20% who had done so on multiple occasions. Reflecting the provincial trend, there was an increase in youth who had engaged in this type of self-harm (27% vs. 19% in 2018 vs. 17% in 2013).

Males were the least likely to report cutting or injuring themselves intentionally in the past year (16% vs. 35% of females vs. 60% of non-binary youth).

Youth also reported engaging in deliberate self-harm other than cutting in the past year.

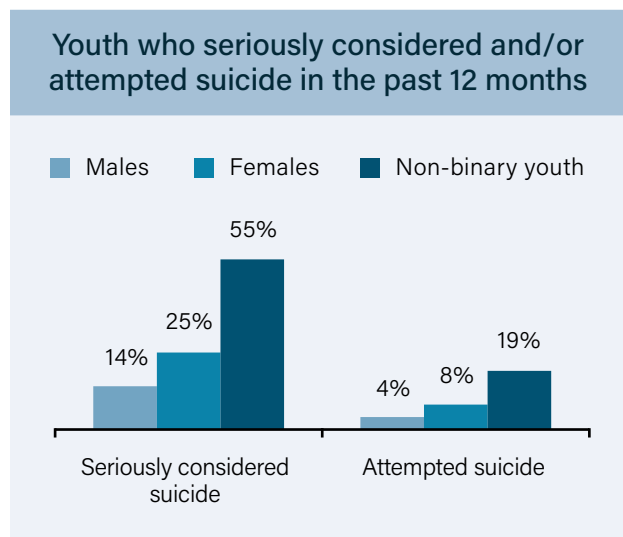
Types of self-harm youth engaged in during the past 12 months (excluding cutting)	
Starved self	20%
Used alcohol or other substances	14%
Over-exercised or exercised while injured	11%
Made a medical situation worse	5%
Got into a physical fight	4%
Had unsafe sex	4%
Drove recklessly	3%
Overdosed	2%
Overused laxatives	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Similar to results in 2018, 21% of youth seriously considered killing themselves in the past year. This was above the provincial rate (18% across BC) and higher than local results a decade earlier (13% in 2013).

Provincially, the percentage of youth who attempted suicide in the past year increased from 2018. This was not the case in the Interior where 7% attempted suicide during this time, which was consistent with results over the past decade but higher than across BC (5% provincially).

Females were around twice as likely as males to have considered or attempted suicide, and non-binary youth were the most likely to have done so.



Having a relative or friend attempt or die by suicide is a known risk factor for youth attempting suicide. In the Interior, 36% of youth had a relative or close friend who had attempted or died by suicide, including 16% who had this experience in the past year.

Within the Interior, the percentage who had ever had this experience ranged from 34% in the Okanagan to 40% in East Kootenay, and those who had this experience in the past year ranged from 15% in the Okanagan to 20% in East Kootenay.

Interior youth were more likely than those across BC to have had a friend or relative attempt or die by suicide (36% vs. 29%), and to have had this experience in the past year (16% vs. 13%).

Specific conditions

“I have way too many mental illnesses for a 13-year-old girl: social anxiety, anxiety, bipolar disorder, OCD ... How do I manage all of these?”

13-year-old youth

“I have not been diagnosed, but believe I might have ADHD.”

17-year-old youth

Reflecting the pattern across BC, there was an increase over time in Interior youth reporting having most of the mental health conditions they were asked about, except depression (which decreased compared to 2018). They most commonly reported having an anxiety disorder.

Specific conditions			
	2013	2018	2023
Anxiety disorder	10%	24%	30%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ADD)	8%	10%	24%
Depression	12%	19%	17%
Eating disorder	N/A	N/A	10%
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)	N/A	N/A	8%
Alcohol or other substance use addiction	3%	4%	8%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	1%	4%	6%
Autism spectrum disorder	1%	2%	6%
Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD/FAS/FAE)	1%	<1%	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

N/A: The item was not included on the 2013 and 2018 BC AHS.

Note: The difference between 2013 and 2018 was not statistically significant for 'alcohol or other substance use addiction' and 'fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD/FAS/FAE)'.

Youth in Grade 7 were the least likely to report some of the conditions, including anxiety disorder (e.g., 23% vs. 32% of Grade 10s and 11s), depression (e.g., 10% vs. 15% of Grade 9s vs. 23% of Grade 12s), an eating disorder (5% vs. 12% of Grade 11s and 12s), and an alcohol or other substance use addiction (e.g., 3% vs. 8% of Grade 10s vs. 11% of Grade 11s).

There were also some gender differences in the conditions youth reported. For example, females and non-binary youth were more likely than males to report they had an eating disorder (e.g., 22% of non-binary youth vs. 3% of males) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (e.g., 10% of females vs. 6% of males). Non-binary youth were the most likely to report having an anxiety disorder (60% vs. 44% of females vs. 14% of males), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (e.g., 47% vs. 24% of males), depression (43% vs. 23% of females vs. 10% of males), autism spectrum disorder (25% vs. 6% of males vs. 3% of females), and post-traumatic stress disorder (16% vs. 8% of females vs. 3% of males).

Access to mental health services

“I feel as though there isn’t enough mental health help for those who can’t involve their parents.”

16-year-old youth

“There are things I think I have but I don’t know how to get diagnosed if my parents won’t let me.”

14-year-old youth

In the past 12 months, the majority of youth had not needed to access mental health services, and 14% were able to access the services they needed. However, a fifth of youth (20%) did not access the services they needed, which was similar to 5 years earlier and higher than in 2013 (11%). Non-binary youth were the most likely to report they had not accessed needed mental health services (47% vs. 28% of females vs. 10% of males).

There was a decrease from 5 years earlier in youth who did not access services because they thought or hoped the problem would go away, and because they did not want their parents or guardians to know. However, these remained the most common reasons youth missed out on mental health services. There was an increase in youth who missed out on care because they did not think they could afford it, they had a previous negative experience, their parent or guardian would not take them, and they were on a waiting list.

Reasons youth did not access mental health services in the past 12 months (among those who felt they needed these services)		
	2018	2023
Thought or hoped the problem would go away	62%	55%
Didn't want parent/guardian to know	61%	54%
Worried their information wouldn't be kept confidential	N/A	44%
Didn't know where to go	41%	41%
Afraid of what they would be told	45%	38%
Too busy to go	35%	34%
Afraid someone they knew might see them	39%	31%
Didn't think they could afford it	22%	26%
Had negative experience(s) before	18%	22%
Parent/guardian wouldn't take them	12%	19%
Had no transportation	12%	8%
On a waiting list	4%	9%
Couldn't go when it was open	4%	5%
The service was not available in their community	3%	4%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Note: The difference between 2018 and 2023 was not statistically significant for 'too busy to go,' 'couldn't go when it was open,' and 'the service was not available in their community.'

N/A: The item was not included on the 2018 BC AHS.

Youth in Grades 11 and 12 were generally more likely than those in lower grades to report that they did not get the mental health services they needed (e.g., 25% of Grade 11s vs. 19% of Grade 9s vs. 10% of Grade 7s), and were specifically more likely to report that the reason for this was that they were too busy (e.g., 44% of Grade 12s vs. 23% of Grade 7s and 8s).

Rates of missing out on needed mental health services were similar across the Interior. However, there were some differences in the reasons youth missed out. For example, the percentage of youth who missed out because they did not think they could afford it ranged from 19% in East Kootenay to 29% in the Okanagan; and those who were worried their information would not be kept confidential ranged from 37% in Kootenay Boundary to 51% in East Kootenay.

Virtual services

In the past 12 months, 15% of youth had accessed virtual counselling or treatment for their mental health. This included 10% who preferred it to in-person counselling and 5% who would have preferred to access in-person counselling. Non-binary youth were the most likely to have accessed virtual services (29% vs. 21% of females vs. 9% of males). Youth in each of the four Interior HSDAs accessed virtual services at similar rates.

Accessing reliable mental health information

“Kids need help seeing professionals who can give them an answer to why they feel the way they do.”

16-year-old youth

When asked where they went for reliable information about mental health, youth most commonly reported going to a family member, followed by a friend or peer.

Where youth accessed reliable information about mental health	
A family member	45%
A friend/peer	35%
Website/online resource	20%
Mental health professional	17%
School staff	12%
Another source	2%
Did not know where to go	8%
Did not go anywhere for this information	28%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

There were few differences within the Interior in where youth went for mental health information, but there were some gender differences. For example:

- Males were the most likely to not go anywhere for reliable mental health information (e.g., 34% vs. 21% of non-binary youth).
- Female and non-binary youth were more likely than males to go to a friend or peer (e.g., 40% of females vs. 29% of males), mental health professional (e.g., 21% of females vs. 13% of males), and school staff (e.g., 18% of non-binary youth vs. 10% of males).
- Non-binary youth were the least likely to go to a family member (e.g., 30% vs. 46% of males) and the most likely to access an online resource (38% vs. 21% of females vs. 16% of males).

Sexual health

Sexual activity

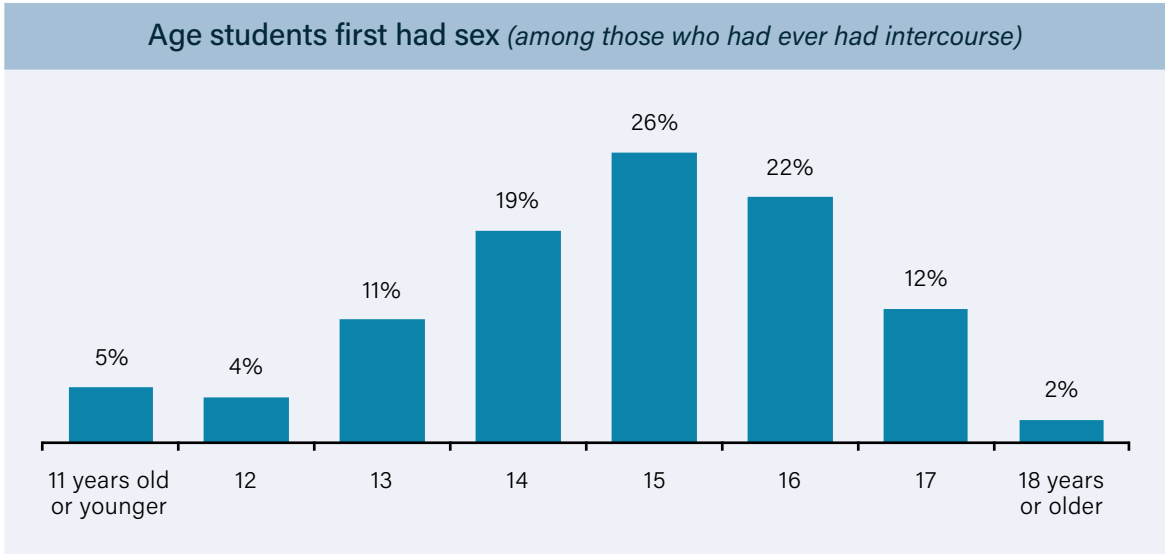
In the Interior, 23% of youth reported they had ever had oral sex (vs. 28% in 2018), and 22% had ever had sexual intercourse (vs. 26% in 2018 and 2013).

Compared to youth across BC, Interior youth were more likely to have engaged in oral sex (23% vs. 17% provincially) and intercourse (22% vs. 16%). There were no differences in sexual activity rates across the region.

As would be anticipated, students in higher grades were more likely than those in lower grades to have ever engaged in oral sex (e.g., 40% of Grade 11s vs. 5% of Grade 8s) and sexual intercourse (e.g., 49% of Grade 12s vs. 13% of Grade 9s vs. 3% of Grade 7s).

Among youth who had ever had sexual intercourse, 84% had been sexually active in the past 12 months. This included 32% who had multiple partners during this time.

Among youth who ever had intercourse, 62% first had sex at age 15 or older, which was a decrease from 65% in 2018.



Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

Protection against sexually transmitted infections

Reflecting the provincial results and consistent with Interior rates over the past decade, 1% of all youth had ever had a sexually transmitted infection.

Similar to results 5 and 10 years earlier, 18% of youth who had ever had oral sex used a condom or other barrier the last time they did so. There was a decrease in youth who used protection the last time they had sexual intercourse (56% vs. 64% in 2018 vs. 68% in 2013; among those who had ever had intercourse). Results were similar in each Interior HSDA.

Forced sexual activity

When asked specifically if they had been forced into sexual activity against their will, 9% of students reported they had been forced into sexual activity by another youth, and 3% by an adult. Males were the least likely to report they had been forced into sexual activity (5% vs. 16% of females vs. 27% of non-binary youth).

Pregnancy involvement

"I need birth control."

12-year-old youth

In the Interior, 1% of youth reported they had been pregnant or caused a pregnancy, which was similar to previous survey years and to the 2023 provincial rate. Also, 2% were unsure if they had been involved in a pregnancy, which was an increase from 2013 and 2018 (e.g., 1% in 2013).

Youth who had engaged in sexual intercourse were asked if they or their partner had made any efforts to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sex. Condoms were the most commonly used method to prevent pregnancy. However, use decreased over the past decade (52% vs. 59% in 2018 vs. 63% in 2013). There was also a decrease in the use of birth control prescribed by a doctor or nurse (36% vs. 50% in 2018); and increases in the use of an IUD (11% vs. 4% in 2018) and emergency contraception (8% vs. 6%).

Around 4 in 10 youth who had ever had intercourse used withdrawal (an unreliable method to prevent pregnancy). Also, 11% indicated withdrawal was the only method they used the last time they had sex, which was higher than in previous survey years (e.g., 8% in 2018).



Method(s) youth used to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sex <i>(among those who had ever had intercourse)</i>	
Condoms	52%
Withdrawal	39%
Birth control pills, birth control patch, NuvaRing, or other method prescribed by a doctor or nurse	36%
IUD	11%
Emergency contraception	8%
Depo-Provera	1%
Not sure	5%
Did not try to prevent pregnancy	3%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among youth who had ever had sexual intercourse, 9% reported that the last time they had sex was with a same-sex partner.

Sex education at school

“I think we need more sexual health classes.”

15-year-old youth

“We need better sexual health education that includes all gender and sexual orientations not just ‘inclusive language!’”

16-year-old youth

In the Interior, 85% of students reported receiving sex education at school (vs. 80% across BC), including 52% who found it helpful and 33% who did not find it helpful. Youth in the Okanagan were the most likely to have received sex education at school (e.g., 91% vs. 75% of East Kootenay youth).

Youth who received sex education at school were asked whether it had met their needs:

- 84% felt the sex education they received was respectful of their culture/religion.
- 83% felt it was relevant to their gender identity.
- 82% felt it had started at the right age for them.
- 80% felt it was relevant to their sexual orientation.
- 60% felt it was relevant to any disability or health condition they had.

Non-binary youth were the least likely to feel the sexual education they had received was relevant to their gender identity (e.g., 59% vs. 85% of females) and to their sexual orientation (50% vs. 80% of females vs. 83% of males).

Accessing reliable sexual health information

“We need more sex ed. I feel like the school system doesn’t explain it good enough and people need to come in, like nurses and tell us.”

15-year-old youth

Youth who wanted reliable information about sexual health most commonly went to their parents for this information, followed by their peers and online resources. Okanagan youth were more likely than those in the rest of the Interior to access information from a sexual health professional (e.g., 14% vs. 8% of Thompson Cariboo Shuswap youth).

There were some gender differences in where youth went when they needed reliable information about sexual health. For example, females were the most likely to go to a same-aged friend or peer (e.g., 32% vs. 22% of males), and were the least likely to access pornography (e.g., 3% vs. 8% of non-binary youth). Non-binary youth were the most likely to go online (39% vs. 22% of females vs. 19% of males), and were the least likely to go to their parent or guardian (26% vs. 33% of males vs. 39% of females).

Where youth accessed reliable information about sexual health	
Parent/guardian	35%
A same-aged friend or peer	27%
Website/online resource	21%
An older youth	15%
Sexual health professional	11%
Family member other than parent/guardian	9%
School staff	7%
Adult outside their family	5%
Pornography	4%
Professional other than sexual health professional	3%
Printed resource (e.g., book, brochure, poster)	2%
Did not know where to go	5%
Did not go anywhere	36%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

The importance of sexual health education and supplies

Having access to reliable sexual health information and supplies was associated with safer sexual practices. For example among youth who had ever had intercourse, those who found the sex education they received helpful were more likely to have used condoms the last time they had sex (57% vs. 47% who had not found it helpful).

Substance use

Vaping

"I wish there was more education at our school about the effects vaping has on our health because this is something that many kids at my school use and it makes me feel unsafe at school."

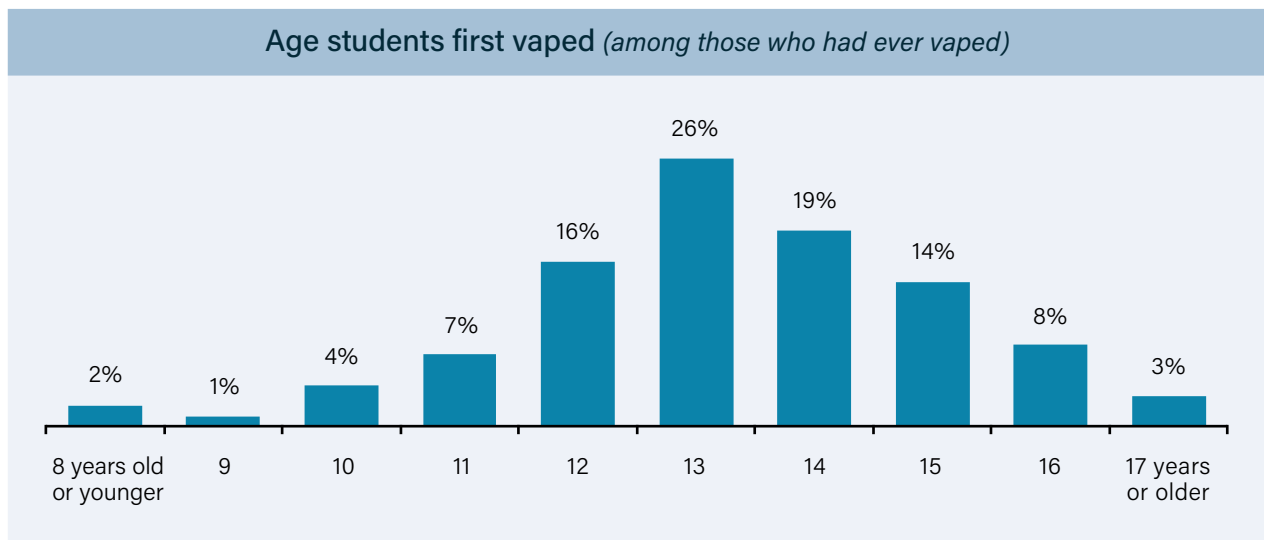
14-year-old youth

"I can't even go into the washroom without people vaping."

16-year-old youth

In the Interior, 35% of youth had ever vaped (vs. 26% provincially), with similar rates in each of the four HSDAs. Females were more likely than males to have tried vaping (41% vs. 30%).

Among youth who had vaped, 13 was the most common age they first did so, and 75% first vaped before the age of 15.



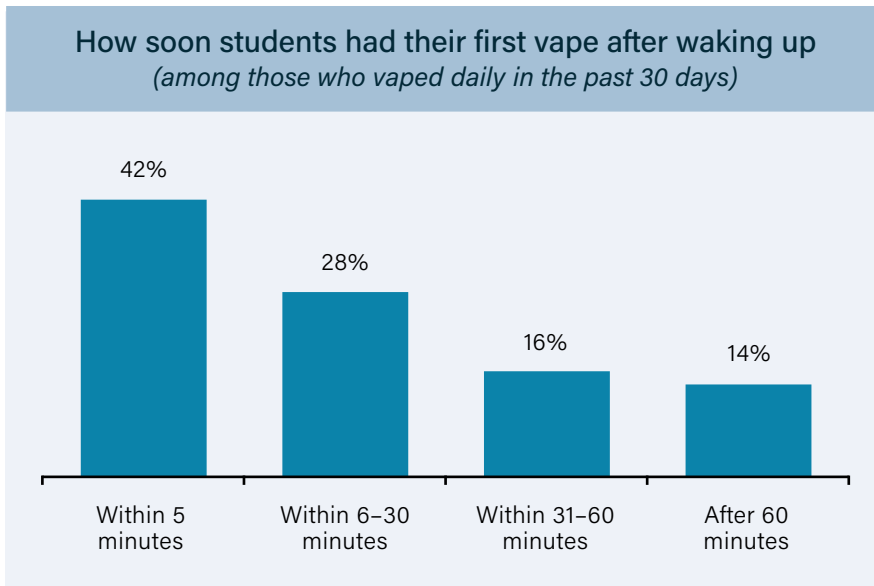
Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

The majority of those who had tried vaping (58%) had vaped in the past 30 days (62% of females vs. 52% of males).

Number of days youth vaped in the past 30 days <i>(among those who had ever vaped)</i>	
0 days	42%
1 or 2 days	14%
3 to 5 days	6%
6 to 9 days	5%
10 to 19 days	8%
20 to 29 days	8%
All 30 days	17%

Among youth who had vaped in the past 30 days, 7% used a product to help them stop vaping during this time.

Among youth who vaped daily, 70% vaped within 30 minutes of waking up.



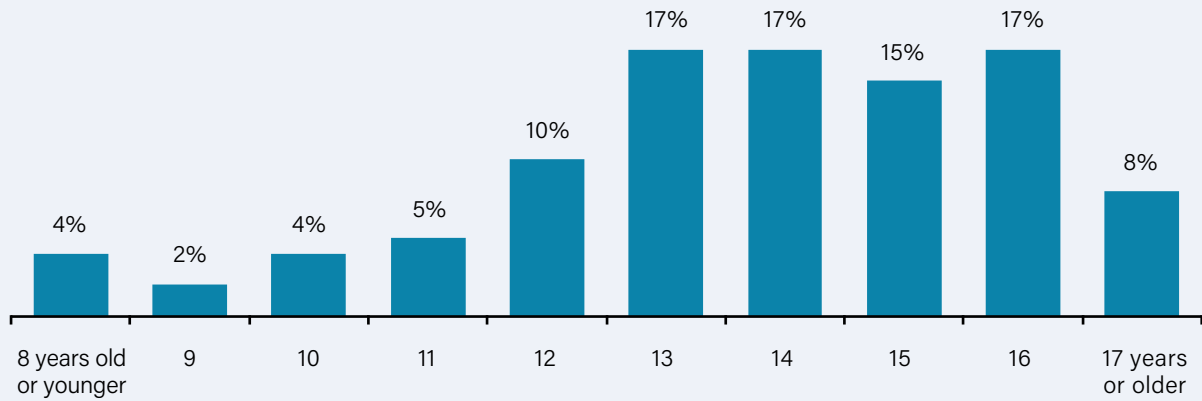
Smoking

Smoking results were similar in each of the Interior HSDAs. Overall, 21% of Interior youth had smoked tobacco, including 2% who smoked tobacco exclusively, and 19% who had both smoked and vaped. (Another 16% had vaped exclusively.) Males were the least likely to have tried smoking (e.g., 19% vs. 23% of females).

The percentage of Interior youth who had tried smoking decreased over the past decade (21% vs. 26% in 2018 vs. 28% in 2013), but was above the 2023 provincial rate (15%).

Comparable to 5 and 10 years earlier, 40% of those who had smoked tobacco waited until they were 15 or older to first do so. However, youth were more likely than 5 years earlier to have first smoked before their 13th birthday (25% first smoked at 12 or younger vs. 21% in 2018).

Age students first smoked tobacco (among those who had ever smoked)



Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

Among youth who had ever smoked, 42% smoked in the past 30 days, and 10% of these youth used a product to help them stop smoking during that time (excluding vapes).

Compared to previous survey years, youth were less likely to have used cigarettes (8% vs. 10% in 2018 vs. 13% in 2013), cigars/cigarillos (3% vs. 5% in 2018 vs. 12% in 2013), and chewing tobacco (2% vs. 4% in 2018 vs. 5% in 2013) in the past month. They were also less likely than those a decade earlier to have used a hookah in the past month (1% vs. 6% in 2013).

Number of days youth smoked tobacco in the past 30 days (among those who had ever smoked)

0 days	58%
1 or 2 days	23%
3 to 5 days	6%
6 to 9 days	3%
10 to 19 days	4%
20 to 29 days	2%
All 30 days	3%



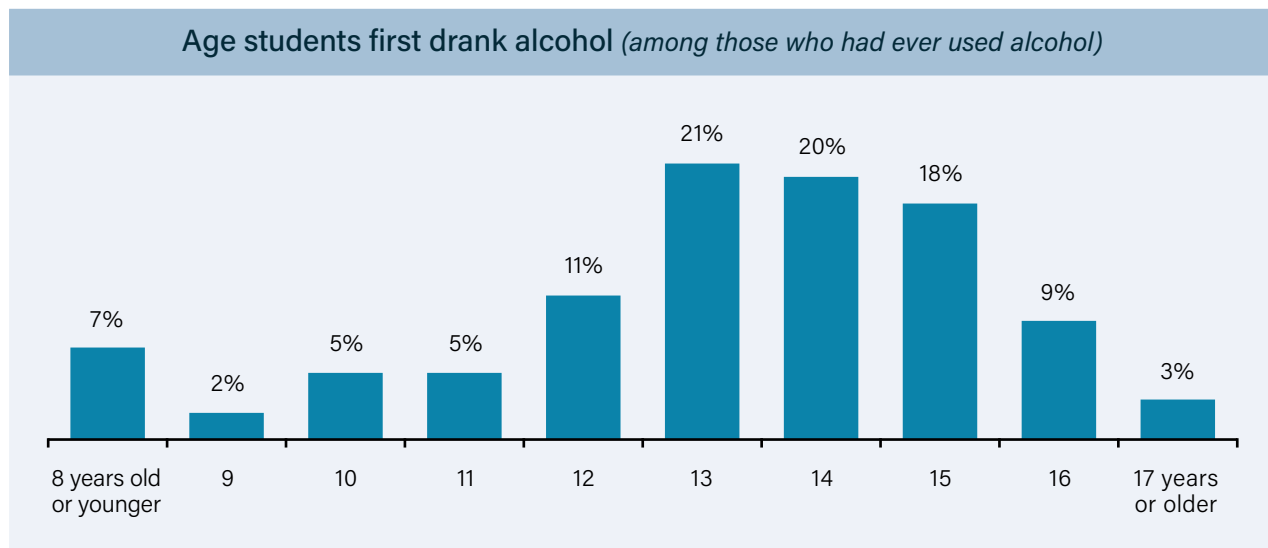
Alcohol

There was a decrease in the percentage of youth who had tried more than a few sips of alcohol (e.g., 50% vs. 55% in 2018). Rates of trying alcohol remained above the provincial rate (38% in 2023), and ranged from 49% in the Okanagan to 56% in Kootenay Boundary. Females were more likely than males to have tried alcohol (54% vs. 46%).

Among youth who had tried alcohol, 29% waited until they were 15 or older to first do so, which was similar to 5 and 10 years earlier. However, reflecting the provincial pattern, youth were more likely to have first had alcohol before their 13th birthday (e.g., 30% vs. 26% in 2018).

Among youth who had ever used alcohol:

- 65% drank in the past month.
- 38% had five or more drinks within a couple of hours on at least 1 day in the past month, including 1% who drank this heavily on 20 or more days.
- Kootenay Boundary youth were more likely than those in the Okanagan to have drunk at least five drinks within a couple of hours in the past month (42% vs. 35%).
- 30% had more than two drinks on at least 1 day in the past week, including 1% who did so daily.



Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

Number of days youth drank alcohol in the past 30 days <i>(among those who had ever used alcohol)</i>	
0 days	35%
1 or 2 days	35%
3 to 5 days	16%
6 to 9 days	8%
10 to 19 days	4%
20 to 29 days	1%
All 30 days	1%

Youth were asked about the types of alcohol they had drunk on the Saturday before taking the survey. Most youth who had tried alcohol (66%) had not drunk that day. Those who did drink most commonly had liquor and coolers.

Types of alcohol youth drank last Saturday <i>(among those who drank that day)</i>	
Liquor	64%
Coolers	57%
Beer	34%
Wine	11%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Cannabis

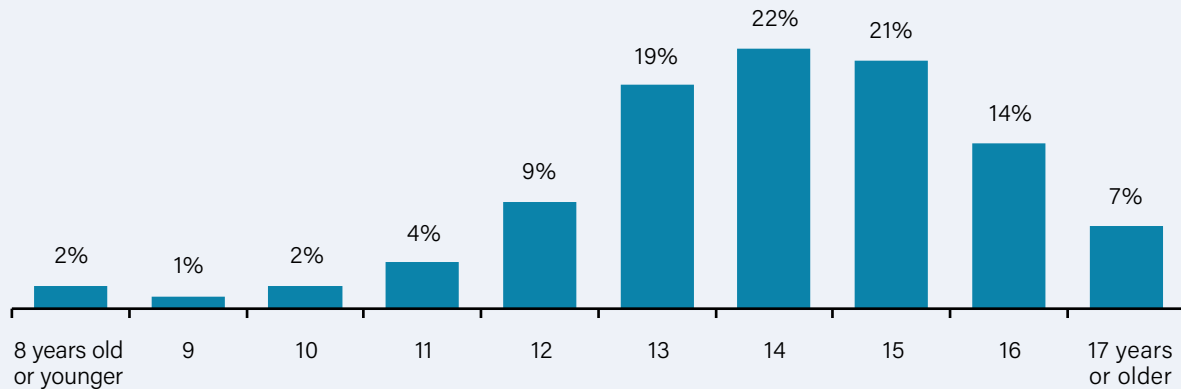
“For about a year I was heavily addicted to weed. Now I am almost 2 months sober.”

18-year-old youth

In the Interior, 32% of youth had ever used cannabis, which was comparable to local results over the past decade and higher than the provincial rate in 2023 (22%). Female and non-binary youth were more likely than males to have tried cannabis (e.g., 35% of females vs. 30% of males). Kootenay Boundary youth were more likely than those in the Okanagan and Thompson Cariboo Shuswap to have tried cannabis (39% vs. 32% in both those HSDAs).

Provincially, there was a decrease in youth who waited until they were 15 or older to first try cannabis. In the Interior, 42% of those who had tried cannabis waited until they were 15 or older to first do so, which was comparable to 2018 and higher than 10 years earlier (35% in 2013).

Age students first used cannabis (among those who had ever used cannabis)



Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

Among youth who had tried cannabis:

- 62% used it in the past month.
- 18% used it on 20 or more days that month.
- 38% used it on the Saturday before taking the survey.

Number of days youth used cannabis in the past 30 days (among those who had ever used cannabis)

0 days	38%
1 or 2 days	21%
3 to 5 days	9%
6 to 9 days	7%
10 to 19 days	8%
20 to 29 days	6%
All 30 days	12%

Youth who had used cannabis were asked about all the ways they had consumed it the last time. Most (74%) smoked it, 35% vaped it, 23% ate it, and 1% took it another way (such as having a cannabis drink).

When asked where they most recently got their cannabis, youth had most commonly shared it among a group of friends. There were some grade differences. For example, among youth who had used cannabis, those in Grades 11 and 12 were more likely than those in lower grades to have purchased their cannabis from a cannabis store (e.g., 17% of Grade 12s vs. 5% of Grade 9s).

Most recent source of cannabis (among those who had ever used cannabis)

It was shared among a group of friends	56%
Friend or family member gave it to them	38%
Bought it from a friend or family member	13%
Bought it from a cannabis store	11%
Bought it from someone they did not know	4%
Someone they did not know gave it to them	3%
Bought it from a website	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Other substances

“[I would like to learn more about] how drugs/certain drugs have affected me like the use of hallucinogens or hard drugs. Especially the use of a drug like mushrooms that are arguably more safe than weed.”

16-year-old youth

Seventeen percent of youth had used substances other than alcohol and cannabis (vs. 14% provincially). There was an increase from 5 years earlier in Interior youth who had used mushrooms (10% vs. 7%), more of their own prescription than prescribed (7% vs. 5%), crystal meth (over 1% vs. under 1%), and ketamine (over 1% vs. under 1%). There was a decrease in those who had used ecstasy/MDMA (2% vs. 4% in 2018) and cocaine (2% vs. 3% in 2018).

Youth in the Interior were more likely than those across BC to have used mushrooms (10% vs. 6%) and other hallucinogens (3% vs. 2%), as well as inhalants (3% vs. 2%); ecstasy/MDMA (over 2% vs. under 2%); crystal meth (over 1% vs. under 1%); and heroin, fentanyl, or other opioids (over 1% vs. under 1%).

There were some differences within the Interior in the substances youth had tried:

- Youth in Kootenay Boundary were the most likely to have tried mushrooms (e.g., 14% vs. 9% of Okanagan youth) and other hallucinogens (e.g., 6% vs. 3% of East Kootenay youth).
- Rates of trying benzodiazepines ranged from 2% in East Kootenay to 4% in Kootenay Boundary.
- Rates of trying inhalants ranged from 2% in the Okanagan to 5% in East Kootenay.

Substances youth had ever used

Mushrooms	10%
More of their own prescription than prescribed	7%
Prescription pills without a doctor's consent (other than benzodiazepines)	4%
Hallucinogens (other than mushrooms)	3%
Inhalants	3%
Benzodiazepines without a doctor's consent (e.g., Xanax, Valium, Ativan)	3%
Ecstasy/MDMA	2%
Cocaine	2%
Heroin, fentanyl, or other opioids	1%
Crystal meth	1%
Ketamine, GHB	1%
Amphetamines	1%



Reported reasons for using substances

The majority of youth who had used alcohol or other substances reported that the reason for their most recent substance use was to have fun. However, they also reported using substances as a way to manage their emotions.

Reasons youth used substances the last time <i>(among those who had used alcohol or other substances)</i>	
Wanted to have fun	64%
Friends were doing it	31%
Wanted to experiment	28%
Because of stress	22%
Felt down or sad	20%
There was nothing else to do	12%
Because of an addiction	7%
To manage physical pain	6%
Thought it would help them focus	4%
Felt pressured into doing it/to fit in	3%
To change the effect of another substance	2%
Didn't mean to (e.g., drink was spiked)	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

There were some gender differences in the reasons youth reported last using substances (among those who had used alcohol or other substances).

For example:

- Females were the most likely to report they last used substances because they wanted to have fun (e.g., 69% vs. 60% of males) and their friends were doing it (e.g., 36% vs. 24% of non-binary youth).
- Non-binary youth were the most likely to have used substances because they wanted to experiment (e.g., 41% vs. 28% of males) and to manage physical pain (e.g., 15% vs. 6% of females).
- Males were the least likely to have used because of stress (e.g., 15% vs. 26% of females), they felt down or sad (e.g., 14% vs. 24% of females), and there was nothing else to do (e.g., 9% vs. 20% of non-binary youth).

There were also some grade differences. For example, older students were more likely to report they last used substances to have fun (e.g., 75% of Grade 12s vs. 64% of Grade 10s vs. 43% of Grade 8s; among those who had used substances), whereas younger ones were more likely to have wanted to experiment (e.g., 43% of Grade 7s vs. 27% of Grade 10s vs. 20% of Grade 12s).

Consequences of substance use

Around half of those who had used substances in the past 12 months (55%) did not report any negative consequences of their use. The most commonly reported consequence was that they were told they did something they could not remember.

Consequences of substance use experienced in the past 12 months *(among youth who had used alcohol or other substances during this time)*

Was told they did something they could not remember	31%
Passed out	22%
Got injured	14%
Argued with family members	12%
School work or grades changed	9%
Damaged property	8%
Lost friends or broke up with a romantic partner	8%
Had sex when they did not want to	6%
Got into a physical fight	5%
Got in trouble with police	4%
Overdosed	2%
Had to get medical treatment	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among those who experienced consequences of their substance use in the past year, females were more likely than males to have been told they did something they could not remember (37% vs. 25%), passed out (25% vs. 19%), got injured (16% vs. 12%), argued with family members (16% vs. 7%), had their school work or grades change (11% vs. 7%), and lost friends or broke up with a romantic partner (10% vs. 5%). Males were the least likely to have had sex when they did not want to (e.g., 4% vs. 12% of non-binary youth).

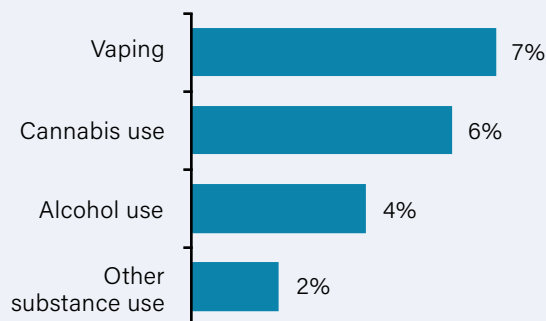
Similar to results over the past decade, 25% of those who had ever had intercourse used alcohol or other substances before having sex the last time.

A small minority of youth had ever driven a vehicle after using alcohol (4% vs. 2% provincially), cannabis (5% vs. 3%), or other substances (1%). A greater percentage had been a passenger in a vehicle with a driver who had been using alcohol (24% vs. 18% provincially), cannabis (20% vs. 13%), or other substances (6% vs. 4%).

Rates of youth driving after cannabis use ranged from 4% in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap to 7% in Kootenay Boundary, and driving after drinking alcohol ranged from 24% in the Okanagan to 28% in East Kootenay. There was also some variability in those who had been a passenger with a driver who had been using cannabis (e.g., 24% of Kootenay Boundary youth had this experience vs. 17% of Thompson Cariboo Shuswap youth).

Youth were asked if they felt or had been told that they needed help for their substance use in the past year. Females were more likely than males to report they needed help for their vaping (9% vs. 5%), cannabis use (7% vs. 4%), and alcohol use (5% vs. 3%).

In the past 12 months, students felt or were told they needed help for ...



Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

Adverse experiences

Sexual harassment

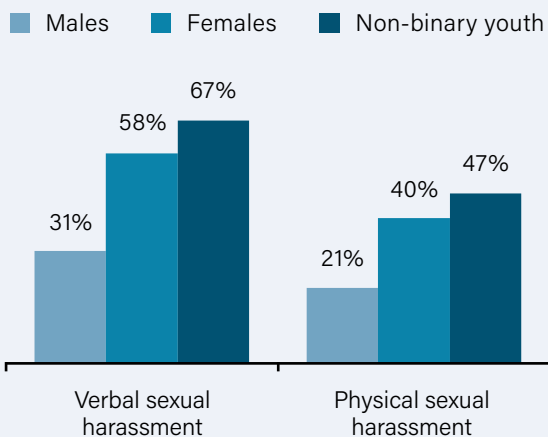
"[I was] sexually harassed for years by a peer."

14-year-old youth

In the past 12 months, 45% of youth experienced verbal sexual harassment (vs. 43% in 2018), and 31% experienced physical sexual harassment (vs. 26% in 2018 vs. 21% in 2013).

Older youth were more likely than younger ones to report they had experienced verbal sexual harassment (e.g., 51% of Grade 11s vs. 41% of Grade 8s) and physical sexual harassment (e.g., 37% of Grade 11s vs. 31% of Grade 9s vs. 18% of Grade 7s) in the past year.

Sexual harassment in the past 12 months



Note: For 'physical sexual harassment' the difference between female and non-binary youth was not statistically significant.

Physical and sexual abuse

"Where would I go to find help anonymously for sexual abuse to know my rights, etc.?"

13-year-old youth

Provincially, there was an increase over the past 5 years in youth who reported they had been physically and/or sexually abused. In the Interior, 17% had been physically abused, which was similar to results in 2018 and higher than a decade earlier (14% in 2013). The percentage who reported they had been sexually abused increased over the past decade (17% vs. 14% in 2018 vs. 11% in 2013). Rates of physical and sexual abuse were similar across the four Interior HSDAs in 2023.

Males were the least likely to have experienced physical abuse (12% vs. 20% of females vs. 32% of non-binary youth), and sexual abuse (8% vs. 24% of females vs. 37% of non-binary youth).

Dating violence

In the past 12 months, 49% of youth reported they had been in a dating relationship (vs. 42% provincially). Among these youth, 9% had experienced physical violence within that relationship (such as being hit, punched, or slapped). This was an increase from 8% in 2018 and 6% in 2013. There were no gender or HSDA differences in experiencing physical dating violence.

There were also no differences across the Interior in experiences of digital dating violence, with 14% of youth reporting that a person they dated had used social media to try to control, embarrass, or hurt them in the past year. Males were the least likely to report this experience (e.g., 11% vs. 22% of non-binary youth).

Discrimination

“I have been discriminated against for my age ... This raises my anxiety and stress levels much more, sometimes making it almost impossible for me to continue doing my job because people are so mean.”

17-year-old youth

Compared to 5 years earlier, there was an increase in youth reporting most forms of discrimination. This reflected the provincial pattern. However, Interior youth were less likely than those across BC to experience some forms of discrimination (including racism), and were more likely to experience other types (including on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation).

	Reasons youth perceived they had been discriminated against in the past 12 months		
	Interior		BC
	2018	2023	2023
Physical appearance	25%	27%	24%
Weight	17%	21%	18%
Gender/sex	9%	15%	14%
Race, ethnicity, or skin colour	8%	11%	15%
Sexual orientation	6%	9%	7%
How much money they/their family had	9%	8%	6%
Religion	N/A	6%	7%
Health condition	N/A	5%	4%
Disability	4%	5%	4%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Note: For 'health condition,' the difference between the Interior and BC in 2023 was not statistically significant.

N/A: The item was not included on the 2018 BC AHS.

Youth were asked about any locations where they had experienced discrimination in the past year. They most commonly reported being discriminated against at school.

Where youth experienced discrimination in the past 12 months	
At school	30%
On social media/online	15%
On the street	7%
In extracurricular activities (e.g., sports)	5%
At work	4%
In stores/restaurants	4%
On public transit	4%
In a hospital or other health care setting	1%
Other	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

The majority of youth who had experienced discrimination in the past year had this experience rarely. However, 10% reported they had experienced discrimination regularly (vs. 7% provincially).

Other forms of victimization

“I am always bullied.”

14-year-old youth

“Me and my friend got harassed online.”

12-year-old youth

“It hurts when you are left out and ignored by others around you.”

13-year-old youth

Youth were asked about their experiences of victimization at school or on the way to and from school in the past year. Compared to 5 years earlier, Interior youth were less likely to have been severely teased (37% vs. 40% in 2018). The percentages who had been socially excluded (41%) and physically attacked or assaulted (9%) remained comparable to 2018.

There was a decrease in youth who reported they had perpetrated one of these forms of in-person victimization in the past 12 months (8% vs. 11% in 2018).

Males were the least likely to report they had been severely teased (27% vs. 46% of females vs. 63% of non-binary youth) and socially excluded (e.g., 28% vs. 53% of females), while females were the least likely to have been physically attacked or assaulted (e.g., 7% vs. 16% of non-binary youth).

In addition to in-person victimization, 19% of youth reported they had been cyberbullied in the past year, including through texts and social media (vs. 16% in 2018), and 9% had perpetrated online victimization (vs. 6% in 2018). Non-binary youth were the most likely to have been cyberbullied (34% vs. 23% of females vs. 13% of males), but there were no gender differences in the perpetration of cyberbullying.

Bereavement

Most youth had experienced bereavement (77% vs. 71% provincially). Compared to 5 years earlier, there was a decrease in those who had been bereaved as the result of an accident (16% vs. 17% in 2018). However, there was an increase in youth who had lost someone close to them due to an overdose (11% vs. 7%) and violence (4% vs. 3%).

Reasons someone close to them had died

Old age/natural death	52%
Illness (other than COVID-19)	51%
Accident	16%
Suicide	13%
Overdose	11%
COVID-19	5%
Violence	4%
Other	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

The percentage of youth who lost someone close to them to COVID-19 ranged from 4% in the Okanagan to 7% in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap.

School experiences

"We should make school start an hour later, it's too early!"

16-year-old youth

"I feel that there is far too much pressure to take the hardest courses or to do the best you can."

17-year-old youth

School connectedness

Reflecting the provincial pattern, youth felt less positive about all aspects of their school experience and their relationships with school staff compared to youth in 2018.

Youth who agreed/strongly agreed they felt ...		
	2018	2023
School staff expected them to do well	80%	76%
School staff treated them fairly	70%	65%
Safe at school	70%	60%
Teachers cared about them	65%	59%
Like a part of the school	57%	51%
Other school staff cared about them	55%	50%
Happy to be at school	55%	45%

Generally, youth in Grade 8 were the least likely to feel safe at school (e.g., 53% vs. 65% of Grade 7s). Those in Grade 7 were the most likely to feel like a part of their school (e.g., 62% vs. 49% of Grade 10s), teachers cared them (e.g., 70% vs. 56% of Grade 11s), other school staff cared about them (e.g., 60% vs. 46% of Grade 11s), and happy to be at school (e.g., 52% vs. 42% of Grade 9s).



Absences

“I was sick recently, but I’m almost never sick. Last year I only missed 1 day of school.”

16-year-old youth

The most common reasons youth missed school in the past 30 days were because of illness and appointments.

Reasons for missing school in the past 30 days	
Illness	53%
Appointments	51%
Skipping	33%
Own mental health (e.g., anxiety, depression)	28%
Sleeping in	27%
Family responsibilities	24%
No transportation	8%
Work	6%
Bullying	6%
Suspension	3%

Youth in higher grades were more likely to have missed school in the past 30 days because they skipped (e.g., 46% of Grade 11s vs. 30% of Grade 9s vs. 13% of Grade 7s), because of their mental health (e.g., 36% of Grade 12s vs. 28% of Grade 9s vs. 19% of Grade 7s), they slept in (e.g., 31% of Grade 11s vs. 20% of Grade 7s and 8s), and they were working (e.g., 11% of Grade 12s vs. 5% of Grade 10s vs. 3% of Grade 7s).

Rates of missing school due to having no transportation ranged from 6% in East Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary, to 10% in Thompson Cariboo Shuswap.

Education plans

Rates of planning to attend post-secondary were similar across the Interior. In 2023, 72% planned to finish high school and pursue post-secondary education, which was a decrease from previous survey years (e.g., 80% in 2018).

Females were the most likely to plan to pursue post-secondary education (79% vs. 67% of males vs. 54% of non-binary youth). Also, urban-based youth were more likely than those in rural communities to plan to attend post-secondary (73% vs. 68%).

School plans	
Did not expect to finish high school	1%
Planned to finish high school but not go to post-secondary	8%
Planned to go to post-secondary	72%
Had not thought about it	11%
Didn't know	8%

School safety

“School bathrooms feel very unsafe because of all the vapers and older kids vaping or using substances.”

14-year-old youth

“School is not a safe place for LGBTQ+ students.”

16-year-old youth

Youth generally felt safe at school, and getting to and from school. However, they were most likely to feel safe in supervised locations such as the library. Youth were less likely than those 5 and 10 years earlier to feel safe in all the locations they were asked about.

Locations where youth usually/always felt safe	Locations where youth usually/always felt safe		
	2013	2018	2023
Library	95%	94%	90%
Getting to and from school	91%	90%	86%
Classrooms	93%	91%	85%
Outside on school grounds	88%	87%	82%
Hallways and stairwells	90%	88%	81%
Cafeteria	91%	89%	81%
Changing rooms	88%	84%	71%
Washrooms	89%	86%	67%

There were some grade and gender differences in where youth felt safe. For example, 90% of Grade 12s usually or always felt safe in classrooms, compared to 81% of Grade 9s; and 78% of Grade 12s felt safe in changing rooms, compared to 66% of Grade 8s. Non-binary youth were the least likely to feel safe in all the locations they were asked about (e.g., 35% usually or always felt safe in the changing rooms vs. 69% of females vs. 77% of males).

The importance of school connectedness

School connectedness can contribute to well-being at school and in other aspects of life. For example, students who felt like a part of their school were less likely to skip classes in the past month (26% vs. 46% of those who did not feel like a part of their school) and to victimize another youth in person in the past year (7% vs. 13%). Also, they were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent (74% vs. 26%), feel quite or very hopeful about their future (77% vs. 32%), and plan to attend post-secondary (78% vs. 59%).

Relationships and connections

Friendships and dating relationships

“I do feel happy with my friends.”

15-year-old youth

“My social anxiety makes it hard for me to make proper and real friends.”

13-year-old youth

Three quarters of youth (75%) reported they had friends whom they could share their ups and downs with, and 71% reported that they got along with the people around them.

Compared to 5 years earlier, youth were less likely to have friends in their school or neighbourhood (94% vs. 96% in 2018), including three or more such friends (69% vs. 81%). Youth in lower grades were the most likely to have three or more in-person friends (e.g., 76% of Grade 7s vs. 62% of Grade 12s).

Provincially, there was an increase from 2018 to 2023 in youth who had online friends whom they had never met in person. However, this was not the case in the Interior, where the rate remained stable (37% in 2023). Within the Interior, youth in rural schools were more likely than those in urban ones to have online friends they had never met in person (40% vs. 36%).

In the past 12 months, 11% of youth across the Interior had dated someone online whom they had never met in person. This was higher than the local rate 5 years earlier (8% in 2018) and the 2023 provincial rate (10%).

Caring and supportive adults

“How do I learn the skills no adult is willing to teach me? (budgeting, taxes, etc.)”

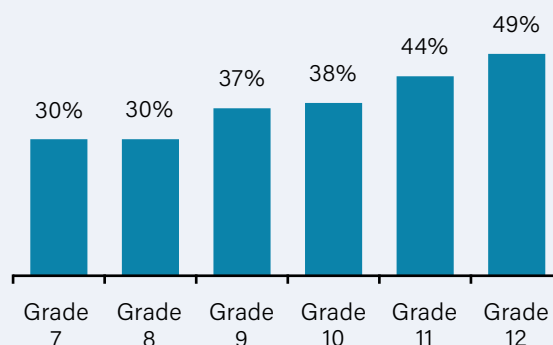
18-year-old youth

Most youth (78%) had at least one adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside of their family and school) who they felt cared about them (vs. 73% provincially).

Also, 75% had an adult inside their family they could talk to when they were having a serious problem, 38% had one outside their family (vs. 31% in 2018), and 29% had both (vs. 22% in 2018).

Older students were more likely than younger ones to have an adult outside their family they could talk to.

Students who had an adult outside their family to turn to when they had a serious problem



Note: Not all differences between grades were statistically significant.

Most youth who felt they needed help with specific tasks had an adult who would help them. Non-binary youth were the least likely to report they had an adult to help with homework, getting a job, and learning life skills (e.g., 78% of those who needed help had an adult to help them get a job vs. 88% of females).

Had an adult to help with tasks <i>(among those who needed help)</i>	
Making/getting to appointments	95%
Learning life skills (e.g., cooking, budgeting)	92%
Getting a job	88%
Preparing for university, college, or trade school	87%
Homework	81%

Family connectedness

“I’d rather not talk about my mental health with my family yet as we don’t have that type of relationship.”

16-year-old youth

The majority of youth felt connected to their family. They were generally less likely to feel this way than youth 5 years earlier.

Youth who felt their family quite a bit/very much ...		
	2018	2023
Respected them	75%	71%
Paid attention to them	72%	70%
Had fun together	70%	70%
Understood them	59%	53%

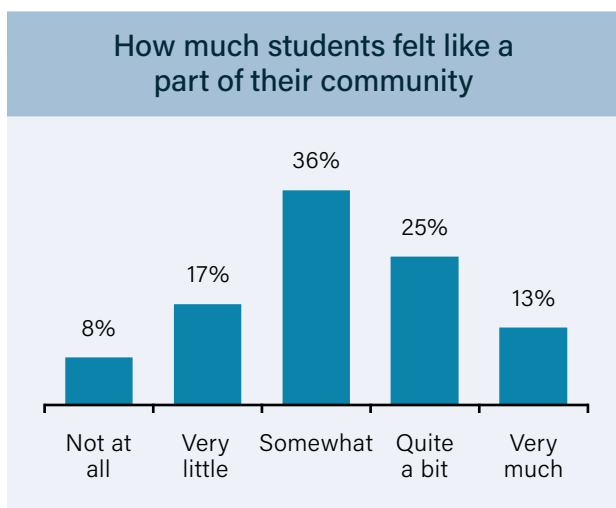
Grade 7s were generally the most likely to feel their family understood them (e.g., 66% vs. 51% of Grade 9s), paid attention to them (e.g., 78% vs. 67% of Grade 10s), and respected them (e.g., 79% vs. 68% of Grade 11s). Youth in Grades 7 and 8 were more likely than those in older grades to feel their family had fun together (e.g., 72% of Grade 8s vs. 64% of Grade 12s).



Community connectedness and sense of safety

Most youth felt at least a little connected to their community, including 39% who felt quite or very connected. This was a return to the rate in 2013 after an increase to 42% in 2018.

Youth in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to feel quite or very connected to their community (e.g., 52% of Grade 7s vs. 39% of Grade 9s vs. 32% of Grade 11s).



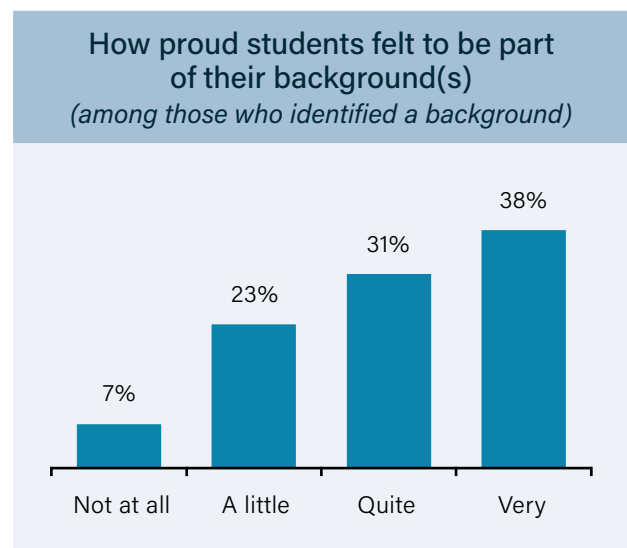
Compared to 5 and 10 years earlier, youth were less likely to often or always feel safe in their neighbourhood during the day (91% vs. 92% in 2013 and 2018) and at night (e.g., 67% vs. 71% in 2018). They were also less likely to feel this safe on public transit (e.g., 52% vs. 57% in 2018; among those who used transit).

Interior youth were more likely than those across BC to often or always feel safe in their neighbourhood at night (67% vs. 64% provincially). Rates of feeling safe in their neighbourhood and when using transit were similar among the four Interior HSDAs.

Other types of connectedness

Cultural pride

Most youth felt at least a little proud to be part of the background(s) they identified with. Youth in the Okanagan were more likely than those in Kootenay Boundary and East Kootenay to feel very proud of their background (40% vs. 34% in these two HSDAs).



Spirituality

Half of youth (50%) felt that spirituality was at least a little important to them, including 12% for whom it was very important.

Connection to the land and nature

"I wish there was more nature involved in school."

15-year-old youth

The majority of youth (63%) felt connected to the land and nature at least sometimes, including 7% who always felt this way.

Time to do the things they want

“I would like to see nature be more a part of the school system (daily walks) for mental health purposes.”

16-year-old youth

“This year, I took too many academic courses, which has given me a significant amount of stress, and has stopped me from spending time with my friends and family.”

17-year-old youth

Youth generally felt they spent the right amount of time with family, friends, on their own, and in nature. Rates were similar to 5 years earlier, except youth were more likely to feel they spent the right amount of time in nature (63% vs. 59% in 2018).

How much time youth felt they had to do what they wanted ...

	Not enough	Right amount	Too much
With family	19%	75%	6%
With friends	27%	69%	4%
On their own	20%	68%	12%
In nature	34%	63%	3%

Youth in higher grades were less likely than those in lower grades to feel they got the right amount of time to do the things they wanted (e.g., 70% of Grade 11s spent the right amount of time with family vs. 79% of Grade 8s).

The importance of connections

Having positive and supportive connections to peers, family, and community promotes youth's health and well-being. For example, youth who felt they had an adult in their neighbourhood who cared about them were more likely to feel quite or very hopeful for their future (65% vs. 45% of those who did not feel an adult cared).

Other types of connections were also important. For example, youth who often or always felt connected to the land or nature were more likely to feel they managed their stress well or very well (52% vs. 47% of those who never or hardly ever felt connected).

Recreational activities

Swimming ability

Most Interior youth (73%) reported they were a confident swimmer (vs. 62% across BC), 23% could swim but not confidently (vs. 29%), and 4% could not swim at all (vs. 9%). There were no gender or HSDA differences in being unable to swim.

Extracurricular physical activity

“[I am really good at] any sport or activity outdoors like biking, skiing, fishing, etc.”

17-year-old youth

Youth were asked about their weekly participation in various types of physical activity over the past 12 months. Compared to previous survey years, youth were less likely to take part in organized sports such as soccer and swim teams (e.g., 49% vs. 55% in 2013); as well as dance, yoga, or exercise classes (e.g., 12% vs. 20% in 2013). They were less likely than youth a decade earlier to participate in weekly informal sports such as hiking and biking (58% vs. 64% in 2013); but participation in extreme sports, such as backcountry skiing, returned to the 2013 rate after dropping in 2018.

Compared to the province as a whole, youth in the Interior were more likely to participate in at least weekly informal sports and extreme sports; and were less likely to participate in dance, yoga, or exercise classes.

Participated in sports and exercise at least weekly in the past 12 months			
	Interior		BC
	2018	2023	2023
Informal sports (without a coach)	58%	58%	53%
Organized sports (with a coach)	54%	49%	49%
Exercise at a gym or rec centre	N/A	38%	36%
Extreme sports (e.g., backcountry skiing, BMX)	17%	21%	12%
Exercise to an online video or online class	N/A	12%	12%
Dance, yoga, or exercise classes with an instructor	15%	12%	14%

N/A: The item was not included on the 2018 BC AHS.

Note: In 2023, the difference between the Interior and the province was not statistically significant for 'exercise at a gym or rec centre.'

Rates of participating weekly in extreme sports ranged from 19% in the Okanagan to 24% in East Kootenay, and there were also some gender differences in the activities youth participated in. For example:

- Males were the most likely to have engaged weekly in informal sports (64% vs. 55% of females vs. 35% of non-binary youth), extreme sports (27% vs. 15% of females vs. 7% of non-binary youth), and exercise at a gym or rec centre (45% vs. 34% of females vs. 13% of non-binary youth).
- Females were the most likely to have taken dance, yoga, or exercise classes (e.g., 18% vs. 10% of non-binary youth) and exercised to an online video or class (e.g., 16% vs. 8% of males).
- Non-binary youth were the least likely to have played organized sports (e.g., 25% vs. 49% of males).

There were also some grade differences as Grade 7s were the least likely to have exercised at a gym or rec centre (e.g., 23% did so weekly vs. 45% of Grade 11s). Youth in higher grades were less likely to have participated in organized sports (e.g., 36% of Grade 12s did so weekly vs. 48% of Grade 10s vs. 57% of Grade 8s).

Barriers to engaging in extracurricular physical activity

“I have a disease that limits my physical ability to run, jump, and other physical activities.”

12-year-old youth

In the Interior, 65% of youth reported experiencing barriers to engaging in extracurricular physical activity. The most common barrier was that they were too busy to participate (53% of Grade 12s vs. 26% of Grade 7). There were no differences across the Interior in the barriers youth experienced.

Barriers youth reported experiencing to participating in physical activity in the past 12 months

Too busy	37%
Was injured	24%
Too anxious/depressed	20%
Thought it was too competitive	17%
Worried about being bullied by another youth	15%
Couldn't get there or get home	13%
Didn't feel welcome	12%
Couldn't afford it	10%
Activity wasn't available in their community	10%
Parent/guardian would not allow them to	6%
Worried about being bullied by an adult	6%
Worried about catching something (e.g., COVID-19)	4%
Health needs/disability could not be accommodated	3%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

The importance of extracurricular physical activity

Youth who take part in extracurricular physical activity on a regular basis are more likely to report positive health and well-being. For example, youth who participated in informal sports at least weekly were more likely than those who took part less often to report good or excellent mental health (63% vs. 47%).

Also, youth were more likely to get 8 or more hours of sleep the night before taking the survey if they participated in weekly organized sports (52% vs. 36% of those who took part less often), extreme sports (51% vs. 42%), and informal sports (48% vs. 38%).

Cultural and volunteer activities

In the past 12 months, 36% of youth took part in cultural or traditional activities, including 9% who participated at least weekly. Also, 47% had volunteered without pay during this time, including 15% who did so at least once a week.

Across the Interior, youth in rural schools were more likely than those in urban ones to volunteer (19% vs. 14%) and participate in cultural activities (10% vs. 8%) at least weekly.

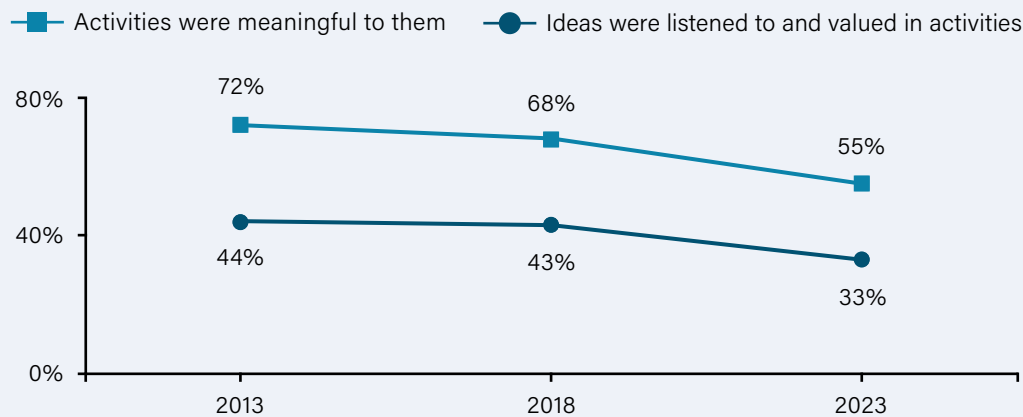
The importance of community engagement

Engagement in the community can help youth to feel connected and supported, and can contribute to positive well-being. For example, youth who took part in cultural or traditional activities on a weekly basis were more likely to feel connected to their community (49% vs. 38% who took part less often), as well as proud of their background (84% vs. 68%).

Connection to activities

Most youth felt the activities they engaged in were at least somewhat meaningful to them, including 55% who felt this way quite a bit or a lot. However, this percentage was lower than in previous survey years, as was the percentage who felt their ideas were listened to and valued within their activities.

Decreases over time in students who felt quite a bit/a lot that their ...



Note: The difference between 2013 and 2018 for 'ideas were listened to and valued' was not statistically significant.

Gambling

In the past year, 37% of youth gambled for money, 13% gambled for something of value other than money, and 32% gambled 'just for fun.' There were no differences among the HSDAs in youth who gambled for money, but youth in East Kootenay were the most likely to have gambled 'just for fun' (e.g., 38% vs. 28% in Kootenay Boundary).

Compared to the province as a whole, youth in the Interior were more likely to have gambled for money in the past year by playing cards/dice in person (13% vs. 11% across BC), sports betting in person (8% vs. 6%), and buying lottery tickets/scratch cards (8% vs. 7%).

Ways that youth gambled for money in the past 12 months	
Bought in-game items (e.g., loot boxes)	21%
Played cards/dice in person	13%
Played in a gaming tournament	10%
Bought lottery tickets/scratch cards	8%
Streamed video games (e.g., Twitch)	8%
Sports betting in person	8%
Played cards/dice online	5%
Sports betting online	5%

Youth were also asked whether they had bet for virtual credits within the past 30 days. Around a third (32%) did not play video games at all during this time, and 49% did not bet with virtual credits. However, 8% had bet with virtual credits they purchased using real money, 11% bet with virtual credits they had won or earned in a video game, and 6% bet for prizes.

In the past year, 2% of youth reported needing help for their gambling, and 10% needed help with their video gaming (vs. 12% provincially). Rates of needing help with gambling and video gaming were similar across the four Interior HSDAs.

An in-depth look at gambling among BC youth will be published using 2023 BC AHS data.

Phone use

"I have a bad porn addiction. It needs to be talked more about in schools and people need to be educated a lot earlier in life. I started watching porn when I was 12. At the time I didn't understand what the effects of it were."

14-year-old youth

Most youth (98%) had a phone or tablet (94% of Grade 7s vs. 99% of youth in Grades 10–12). They most commonly used their device for scrolling through social media.

Youth were less likely than those 5 years earlier to use their phone to watch pornography (5% vs. 11% in 2018) and for sexting (3% vs. 5%). They were more likely to use their phone to gamble (3% vs. 2% in 2018).

Comparable to the provincial rate, 17% of youth felt or had been told that their social media use had reached a point where they needed help in the past year. Rates ranged from 16% in East Kootenay to 21% in Kootenay Boundary.

What youth used a phone/tablet for on their last school day	
Scrolling through social media	74%
Connecting with family and friends	65%
Gaming other than esports	25%
Playing/watching esports	15%
Watching porn	5%
Gambling	3%
Sexting	3%
None of these	11%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Topics youth wanted to learn more about

In the Interior, 7% of youth offered suggestions about health topics they wanted to learn more about. The most common topic they wanted to learn more about was mental health, including learning about specific conditions, healthy coping mechanisms, emotional regulation, and where to access mental health information and resources.

"I would like to learn more about how to control your anger and help reduce stress."
13-year-old youth

"Eating disorder, anxiety, depression, & self-harm addictions."
15-year-old youth

"Self-harm because I am doing it & trying to find better coping skills."
15-year-old youth

"Better education in school about mental illnesses and coping mechanisms."
17-year-old youth

"I think a mental health education program should be implemented in schools similar to DARE and sex-ed. Eating disorders would be a good topic point."
18-year-old youth

Another common topic students wanted to learn about was sexual health, including information about STIs, sexual assault, and consent, as well as sexual health information specifically for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

"I wish there were more in-school resources for sexual assault and abuse."
18-year-old youth

"I would like to learn more about how important protected sexual things are because they don't teach us at school about sexually transmitted disease."
17-year-old youth

"I strongly believe that sexual education should continue past grade 10."
18-year-old youth

"More inclusive language in sex ed and more sex ed for LGBTQ+ people."
15-year-old youth

"Sexual education (peer pressure, effects on teens, the stuff they don't teach)."
15-year-old youth

Some of the other topics youth wanted to learn more about included physical health such as nutrition, sleep, and exercise.

"More on food and sleep and exercise. More about an eating disorder. Answering questions about food could show how many kids truly do worry about what they put in their bodies."
16-year-old youth

"How lack of sleep affects students. (Having to wake up early in the morning)."
17-year-old youth

"I did not learn nearly enough about personal health. I think schools should teach more about important life skills for regulating health (diet, sleep, etc.)."
17-year-old youth

Resources

To request a presentation or workshop, and for further details about all the resources listed below, please email mccreary@mcs.bc.ca.

2023 BC AHS dissemination materials

The results presented in this report provide an overview of the 2023 BC AHS data for the Interior region of BC. Provincial results and reports for the four Interior HSDA regions are also available. To view the provincial results, and the latest reports, fact sheets, infographics, and other resources produced from the 2023 BC AHS, please visit: mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs.

To view the Thompson Cariboo Shuswap report: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_thompson_cariboo_shuswap.pdf.

To view the Okanagan report: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_okeanagan.pdf.

To view the Kootenay Boundary report: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_kootenay_boundary.pdf.

To view the East Kootenay report: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_east_kootenay.pdf.

PowerPoint presentations of each of the reports are also available for anyone to use.

A video created by a group of young hip hop artists in Vancouver (titled "Generations") shares some of the comments provided by participants in the 2023 BC AHS, and is available at youtube.com/user/McCrearyCentre.

Accessing the BC AHS data

Researchers from academic institutions and other partner agencies are encouraged to contact mccreary@mcs.bc.ca if they would like to apply to access the data, or to commission McCreary to conduct additional research projects with the data.

Engaging youth in the 2023 BC AHS results

Next Steps workshops

The Next Steps is an award-winning workshop series that supports youth to engage with the BC AHS data. A toolkit is available that provides facilitators (e.g., teachers, nurses, youth workers, and other adult supports) with a workshop template that can be used to share results of the survey with youth aged 12 to 19. It includes an introduction to the results, interactive activities to learn about risk and protective factors, and discussion questions to explore local youth health issues. For more information and to get a copy of the toolkit, email katie@mcs.bc.ca or visit mcs.bc.ca/next_steps.

Research Slam

The Research Slam program is a fast-paced weekend or week-long program which teaches youth basic community-based research skills, including ways to answer their research questions using BC AHS data. To learn when the next Research Slam is scheduled or to discuss bringing a Research Slam to your school or community contact mccreary@mcs.bc.ca.

Youth Action Grants (YAGs)

YAGs offer up to \$750 for youth-led projects that address findings from the BC AHS and that seek to support or improve youth health. For more information on how youth can apply, please visit mcs.bc.ca/youth_action_grants.

Youth Health Ambassadors (YHA)

The YHA are a team of school-aged youth across BC who facilitate conversations with their peers about youth health topics, and support the sharing of the BC AHS data. For more information or to join the YHA, email evelyn@mcs.bc.ca.

To learn more about McCreary's current projects and to access additional resources, please consider joining our community mailing list by emailing mccreary@mcs.bc.ca.



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