In 2013, the McCreary Centre Society will conduct the fifth BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS V). The AHS is a province-wide questionnaire used to gather current information about a broad range of factors affecting youth health in BC.

Since 1992, over 100,000 students in Grades 7-12 have completed the survey. In 2008, 50 of the 59 BC school districts participated in the BC AHS (85%).

The BC AHS is the most comprehensive source for reliable, accurate and BC-based information about youth health. Survey results are used extensively by schools, communities, government agencies, health professionals and by youth themselves in planning and evaluating programs and services. Because the survey has been in use since 1992, it gives policy makers, governments and agencies the ability to track trends over two decades.

The BC AHS V will provide up to date, accurate information about what BC youth know, think and do about their own health. Survey questions cover factors that promote healthy development and behaviours that may compromise health. Question topics include physical and mental health, school, family, substance use, injuries, extracurricular activities, violence and discrimination, and technology use.

“As a Public Health Nurse who administered the AHS, I was impressed with the commitment of the students and staff. Students value having an opportunity to have a voice to influence policies and programs that affect their health and safety. It is the most accurate way to identify current health issues and significant trends in adolescent health.”

— Pat Mauch,
Retired Public Health Nurse, Vancouver

### About the survey

- 130 item, paper and pencil questionnaire.
- Conducted by trained public health nurses.
- Asks about topics that promote healthy development and behaviours that may compromise health.
- Can be completed in one classroom period.
- Confidential, anonymous and voluntary for students.
- Parents have the opportunity to refuse participation for their child.
- This will be the fifth AHS. It was also conducted in 1992, 1998, 2003 and 2008.
- No cost to School Boards, schools or students.
How it works

McCreary works with Statistics Canada to select a representative sample of classrooms throughout the province. Not every student is asked to fill out the questionnaire, and parents or guardians have the right to refuse to allow a student to participate. Trained public health nurses and nursing students administer the survey in classrooms.

The public health nurse will contact individual schools that have been included in the sample and make arrangements to administer the survey.

The nurse and school will work together to choose which classrooms participate and agree on a time that is mutually convenient to administer the survey between January and May 2013. Teachers will send information letters home to parents prior to the survey taking place.

School districts have the choice between selecting whether students need signed parental consent to participate, or parents are informed about the survey and asked to help their child decide whether to participate. Students must also provide consent to participate.

School districts that do not require signed parental consent benefit from a more representative sample, while sampling from fewer classrooms and reducing the time spent surveying in schools.

How will results of BC AHS V be shared?

As in the past, McCreary will take the results of the BC AHS V back to communities, school districts, health professionals and policy makers.

McCreary also intends to continue to translate the data into action at a community level through the Next Steps workshop model, which engaged over 1,000 youth across the province with BC AHS IV. Youth will have a chance to respond to survey results, discuss how this information can be used to meet health needs in their community and deliver local projects which improve youth health.

What’s new for 2013

The BC AHS V retains most questions from BC AHS IV and will ask new questions about:

- Sleep
- Technology use
- Concussions
- Hitchhiking
- Community connectedness
- Coming to Canada
- Being a young caregiver
- Neighbourhood safety
- Positive mental health

“Having a true understanding of the day-to-day lives of young people — their health, emotional and physical well-being, the circumstances in which they live — is vital in developing programs and policies which respond to their needs. Representing the voices of almost 30,000 young people from across the province, the McCreary Adolescent Health Survey cuts through social misconceptions, helping us to focus our resources in a more meaningful and productive way.”

— Stephen Brown,
Deputy Minister, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development
What were the key findings from the survey last time?

Results from BC AHS IV showed that most BC youth were in good physical and mental health, had plans for the future, and were less likely to engage in risky behaviours than their peers who completed earlier surveys. For example, fewer youth had ever tried alcohol, marijuana or cigarettes than in 2003, and fewer youth seriously considered suicide than at any time since the survey began in 1992.

Although the results showed encouraging trends in student health, they also highlighted some areas of concern such as a rise in the misuse of prescription pills. The results also demonstrated that building protective factors such as family and school connectedness can contribute to more positive outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth in BC.

How do you know youth are honest when they answer?

The survey is administered by public health nurses and is not seen by anyone at their school. Students are aware that the information they provide is confidential.

Following BC AHS IV, McCreary screened all of the surveys and removed less than 1% of the surveys. Youth have reported that they take the survey seriously and respond honestly because it is administered by nurses.

Are there any new benefits to participating in the survey?

McCreary’s Youth Advisory and Action Council is facilitating a granting program which will allow students across BC to apply for funding for youth-led projects aimed at improving youth health in communities which participate in the BC AHS V. This program will run in addition to the established Next Steps program which also engages students in projects to improve youth health.

Since BC AHS IV was published in 2009, the results have been increasingly used by government and other policy makers to determine priority areas for funding and action (for example, through the BC 10 year mental health plan and the Public Health Officer/Office of the Representative for Children and Youth’s Growing up in BC reports). By participating in the AHS, school districts ensure that local concerns are included in provincial planning processes.

How else have the results of the last survey been used?

In addition to providing school districts with confidential BC AHS IV data tables and publishing regional and provincial reports, McCreary produced a range of topic-focused reports and fact sheets. These included information about Aboriginal youth health, physical activity, substance use, and promoting positive mental health.

A range of youth-friendly resources were also created using BC AHS IV data and these continue to be used by teachers, nurses, McCreary staff, youth and others with an interest in engaging youth in a dialogue about their health in classrooms across BC.

Will youth understand the questions on the survey?

In addition to consultations with school district personnel and other experts in youth health, youth across BC have had the opportunity to comment on the questions they feel are important to ask, and have been involved in piloting and developing the survey. Survey questions have been added, removed or modified based on their feedback.

Will asking about a behaviour encourage a student to try it?

McCreary and other research has found no evidence to suggest that youth will be influenced to try a risky behaviour if they are asked a question about it. For more information, please refer to the document “Is There Any Harm in Asking?”, available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

What if parents object to their child taking the survey?

Parents have the right to withdraw their child from the survey, even in school districts where signed parental consent is not required to participate. McCreary staff are happy to answer parent queries and concerns.

Copies of this booklet and other information about the BC AHS are available to download at www.mcs.bc.ca.
“The relationship between my office and the McCreary Centre Society is one of the most important collaborations and partnerships for me. The AHS in particular has been an invaluable tool for us and the findings featured prominently in our Growing Up in B.C. report in 2010. McCreary’s focus on youth outreach and careful attention to accurately reflecting what youth have to tell us about their lives is without parallel.”

— Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, BC Representative for Children and Youth

Each participating school district will receive:

- A provincial highlights report, including trends over the past ten years.
- Regional reports for the province’s 16 Health Service Delivery Areas, providing a more local picture of youth health.
- A confidential copy of school district data tables.
- Full reports on topics of specific interest.
- Fact Sheets providing informative summaries of specific topics.
- Youth resources developed by youth and for youth.
- Presentations of the findings to school boards, school personnel, parents and students.
- Resources for use in classrooms.
- Access to youth workshops and McCreary Youth Advisory and Action Council’s funding program.

Note: No direct comparisons of survey results will be made between school districts.
No school level data will be published.

About McCreary Centre Society

McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and community based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to identify and address the health needs of young people in the province. Please visit our website (www.mcs.bc.ca) or follow us on twitter (@mccrearycentre).

If you have questions or comments, please contact:

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The AHS is conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, in collaboration with the provincial government and public health system. The AHS is funded by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development and BC Ministry of Health, and informed and supported by the BC Ministry of Education and other key Ministries.