

MEDIA RELEASE | 13th November 2019

Local youth more likely to be smoking tobacco and less likely to be vaping

McCreary Centre Society today released the Northeast regional results of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey. The survey was completed by over 38,000 of the province's Grade 7–12 students, including all three school districts in the region.

Results showed that Northeast youth were more likely to have smoked tobacco (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, or cigarillos) than youth across the province, but were less likely to have vaped.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *"The fact that almost 3 out of every 10 students aged 12 to 19 have smoked tobacco is concerning, as is the fact that although vaping rates are lower than we see provincially, there are emerging health concerns attached to vaping."*

Smith went on to say, *"There were some encouraging local results in the use of other substances as there was a reduction in recent binge drinking, and in youth who had tried marijuana and ecstasy or MDMA. Also, more of those who tried marijuana waited until they were older to first do so."*

Other positive local results showed that most local youth had an adult in their community who really cared about them, felt safe in their neighborhood, felt connected to their family and school, and felt they had a good life.

Concerning findings included a decrease in positive mental health and an increase in suicidal ideation among girls, and a rise in eating disordered behaviour among boys.

The report, *Balance and connection in the Northeast: The health and well-being of our youth*, is now available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

A PowerPoint presentation is also available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation, and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

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BACKGROUND

The 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 58 of BC's 60 school districts and is the sixth time students have been asked to complete the comprehensive health survey since 1992.

The 2018 survey included 140 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their current physical and mental health, their engagement in health promoting and health risk behaviours, and about factors that can contribute to a healthy transition to adulthood.

Participation was the highest since the survey began, and the results are considered representative of over 95% of mainstream school students in Grades 7–12 in the province.

Northeast HSDA is comprised of Peace River North, Peace River South, and Fort Nelson school districts. All three districts in this region have participated in the survey since 2003, and two of the three have participated in all six waves of the survey.

Some key findings from the report:

Northeast youth are becoming increasingly diverse. For example, the percentage who identified as European decreased (from 59% in 2013 to 52% in 2018), while those who identified as Southeast Asian increased (from 2% to 6%).

Northeast students were more likely than those across BC to have worked at a paid job in the past school year, and to have worked in excess of 20 hours a week (13% vs. 8% provincially). Locally, males were twice as likely as females to work 21 or more hours a week (18% vs. 9%, among students who were employed).

Around half (48%) of Northeast students slept eight or more hours on the night before completing the survey. Students reported doing various activities after the time they were expected to be asleep, including chatting or texting; homework; gaming; and other online activities such as watching videos and checking social media.

The percentage of local youth who had eaten food grown or caught by them or their family increased from 18% in 2013 to 25%. Despite this, less than a third (31%) ate three meals a day on school days (vs. 37% across BC). Males were the most likely to always eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

As in 2013, 16% of females vomited on purpose after eating in the past year. The percentage of local males who had done so rose from 5% to 12%.

Similar to the provincial rate and to the local percentage five years earlier, 21% of Northeast youth aged 12–17 met Canadian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines in the week before taking the survey.

Northeast youth were more likely than their peers across BC to have sustained a concussion (19% vs. 13%). Local youth were less likely than their peers to always wear

a helmet when cycling; skiing; snowboarding; riding an ATV, dirtbike, or snowmobile; mountain biking; and BMXing.

Across BC there was a decline in the percentage of male and female students who reported good or excellent mental health. Locally, this decline was only seen for females as the percentage dropped from 74% in 2013 to 60%. In contrast, 81% of local males reported good or excellent mental health.

In the past year, 20% of local youth had seriously considered suicide and 6% had attempted suicide. This represented an increase in suicidal ideation for females (from 20% in 2013 to 27%). Also, 9% of females attempted suicide (vs. 3% of males).

In the past year, 22% of students had missed out on needed mental health services (vs. 18% across BC). This represented a local increase from 14% in 2013. Local youth were twice as likely as those across BC to have been placed on a waiting list (10% vs. 5% provincially).

Northeast youth were more likely to have smoked tobacco (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, or cigarillos) than youth across BC (29% vs. 18%), but were less likely to have vaped with nicotine (17% vs. 21%).

Among students who drank on the Saturday before taking the survey, 65% engaged in binge drinking, which was a decrease from 76% in 2013.

About a quarter (26%) of Northeast youth had tried marijuana (with no gender differences), which was a local decrease from 31% in 2013. Also, more youth waited until they were at least 15 years old to first try marijuana.

Similar to five years earlier, 16% of Northeast students had been physically abused or mistreated and 14% had been sexually abused. The rate of sexual abuse for local males was comparable to males across BC (4%), but was higher for females (23% vs. 17% provincially).

Most Northeast youth (71%) felt there was an adult in their neighbourhood or community who really cared about them (vs. 65% provincially). Also, 31% had an adult outside their family they could talk to if they were having a serious problem (vs. 27% provincially).

Students who felt they had the right amount of unstructured time to spend on their own were more likely to report positive mental health and well-being. For example, they were less likely to experience extreme stress (8% vs. 30% of those who felt they did not have enough time on their own).

Most Northeast youth could identify something they were really good at, felt good about themselves, reported satisfaction with their life, and were hopeful for their future.

The most common topic Northeast youth identified as wanting to learn more about was mental health.