

# SUMMARY REPORT

# 2017

## WISCONSIN YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**  
Tony Evers, PhD, State Superintendent

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SUMMARY REPORT

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# 2017 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey

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**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction**

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## WHAT IS THE YRBS?

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This report provides an overview of the 2017 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The 2017 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey was conducted as part of a national effort by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health risk behaviors of the nation's high school students.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has administered the YRBS every two years beginning with 1993. The 2015 survey failed to secure the target response rate, thus making 2013 the most recent dataset prior to the success of this 2017 survey.

The YRBS is a self-administered, anonymous, 99-item questionnaire that students take in a proctored environment during the school day. Survey procedures were designed to protect the privacy of students by allowing anonymous and voluntary participation. Local parent permission procedures were followed before administration, including informing parents that their child's participation was voluntary. The 2017 questionnaire is available on the DPI website.

Results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey are representative of all public high school students in Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> The 2017 survey was completed by 2,067 students in 43 public, charter, and alternative high schools in Wisconsin during the spring of 2017. The school response rate was 88%, the student response rate was 88%, and the overall response rate was 77%. The weighted demographic characteristics of the sample are as follows:

Gender	
Female	48.70%
Male	51.30%

Grade Level	
9th grade	25.40%
10th grade	25.10%
11th grade	25.10%
12th grade	24.30%
Other	0.10%

Race/Ethnicity	
Asian American	2.30%
Black/African American	8.60%
Hispanic/Latino	10.20%
White	73.90%
All other races	1.00%
Multiple races	4.10%

<sup>1</sup>Completion of the survey depends on a student's ability to read and complete a 99-question survey. Thus, students with very limited reading skills or significant intellectual or learning disabilities, may not be adequately represented in this data.

## KEY FINDINGS

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In line with national trends, Wisconsin's 2017 YRBS shows a notable, continuing decrease in key risk behaviors such as use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, and sexual behavior. Depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation are on the rise, and anxiety is high. Students report greater use of screens, less sleep, and poorer self-reported health. These may be related: young people appear to be spending less time out engaging in risks, and more time online and interacting virtually.<sup>2</sup>

Indicators of school belonging remained high and steady. In general, white straight males reported the highest levels of belonging, whereas other groups reported a lower sense of belonging and higher risks of mental health concerns. The following types of students generally report higher rates of victimization, fewer supports, and more distress:

- Females<sup>3</sup>
- Students of Color
- Students with disabilities
- LGBT students<sup>4</sup>
- Students with D's or F's

Students who have several of these identities have added risks. However, a student's history and identity are not destiny: even students with many risk factors do better when they have a high sense of belonging and social support. Additional 2017 YRBS reports will provide more detailed information on such high risk groups, as well as special topics such as suicide and bullying.

The information provided here is only a start: it should spark deeper community conversations about why we see these numbers. For instance, the YRBS shows that students who get less sleep also get lower grades. But YRBS data doesn't explain what's keeping these students from sleeping more: Online entertainment? Poor housing conditions? Texts from suicidal friends? Anxiety? Trauma? There is evidence for all of these possibilities. The answer to this kind of question informs what we do about a problem, and how we treat our young people. Those answers can only come from conversations with young people and their communities.

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<sup>2</sup>See e.g. Twenge, Jean. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (2017).

<sup>3</sup>Females do have high rates of supports.

<sup>4</sup>LGBT estimates are calculated based on one question about sexual orientation and another question about gender identity. Only students who selected a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender category are represented here. Students who answered "Not sure" are not included.

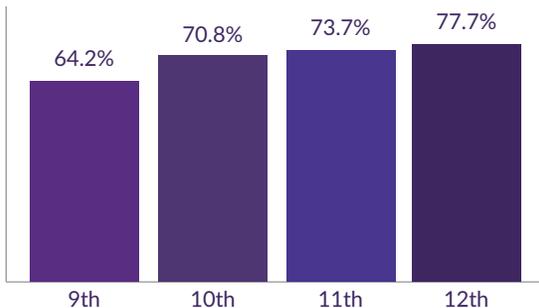
# PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Positive influences have been described as assets, or protective factors. These assets have the power to protect youth from risk behaviors and some forms of victimization, as well as promote health behaviors and general well-being. Historically, Wisconsin high school students have reported high levels of assets. In 2017, students reported high levels of social support and belonging.

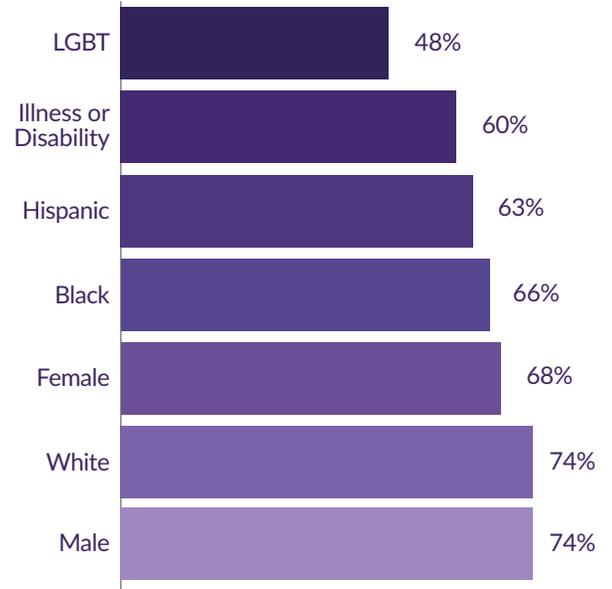
Generally, students who report having strong family and teacher support, as well as high levels of school belonging, are less likely to engage in risk behaviors (e.g., physical fights, carrying a weapon, alcohol and drug use, risky sexual behavior) and more likely to report positive mental health and higher grades.

- 71.6% of students reported having at least one teacher or other adult at school they could talk to.
- Older students are most likely to have a teacher to talk to (see below).
- At 57.8%, LGBT students are the least likely group to have a teacher to talk to.

**Percent of Students Who Have at Least One Teacher They Can Talk to About a Problem, by Grade**



## Sense of Belonging at School



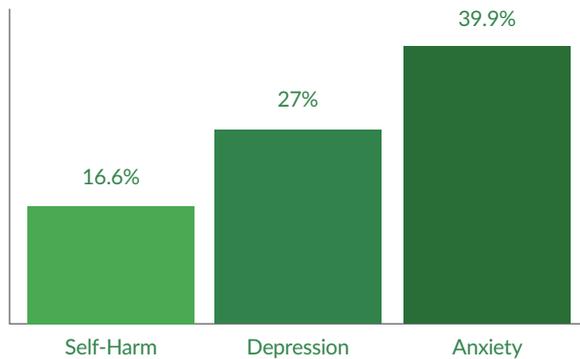
Students were also asked about whether they feel they belong at their school.

- Overall, 70.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they belong at their school.
- A student's race, gender, and sexual orientation play a big role in whether they belong. The graph above shows all of these as distinct categories, but the combinations also hold true: e.g., white males report a higher sense of belonging (77.7%) than males from other races (64.7%).

# MENTAL HEALTH

There is a growing understanding among educators that mental and emotional well-being are paramount to school success. School environments can also contribute to a student's positive or negative mental health. The 2017 YRBS included questions related to depression, anxiety, self-harm, and help-seeking. This was the first time students were asked about anxiety.

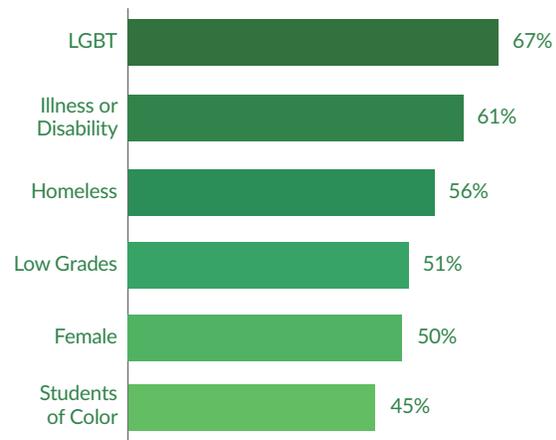
## Self-Reported Rates of Anxiety, Depression, and Self-Harm



- Almost 40% of students indicated high levels of anxiety.
- There was a clear gender component to anxiety, with nearly half of female students reporting anxiety, vs. approximately 30% of male students.

- Some groups had extremely high rates of anxiety, including LGBT students, students with physical disabilities or chronic health conditions, students who are homeless or “doubled up” with friends or relatives due to eviction or economic hardship, students with low grades, females and students of color (see below).
- Depression rates (27%) were lower than anxiety, but had a similar breakdown in terms of high risk groups.
- One in six students (16.6%) indicated that they had engaged in self-harm. Overall, one in four females engaged in self-harm. Among 9th grade girls, a history of self-harm is almost as common as eating breakfast every day (30% vs. 32%).
- In terms of trends, depression is significantly up; self-harm is steady. There is no trend data yet on anxiety.

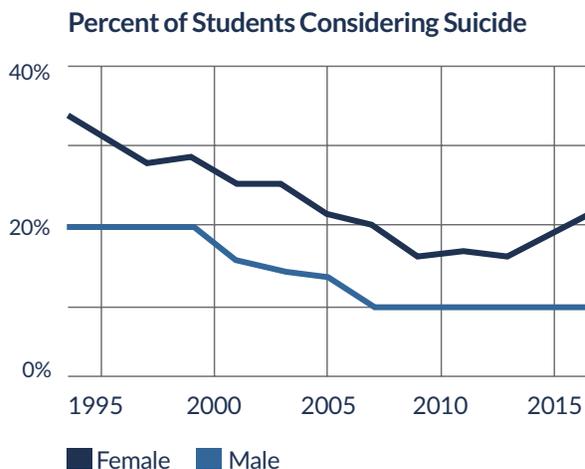
## Self-Reported Anxiety Among Highest Risk Groups



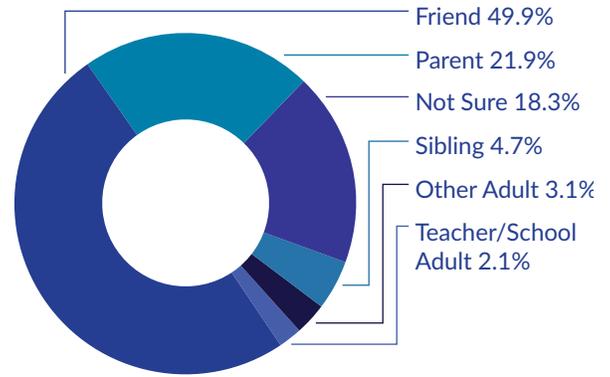
# SUICIDE AND HELP SEEKING

At the extreme of emotional distress is suicidal ideation.

- 16.4% have considered suicide.
- 15.0% made a plan.
- 7.8% actually attempted suicide.
- Suicidal ideation decreased through the early 2000s, but appears to be increasing.
- The increase is most notable for females.
- Considering suicide is highest among students who are LGBT (41%), have disabilities (35%), lack stable housing (31%), or get mostly D's or F's (28%).
- Rates are also higher for students who report experiences of violence or bullying.
- About half of the students who are considering suicide also report having made an attempt. Thus, students' talk of suicide should not be taken lightly.



## Who Do Students Talk to When Upset?



Seeking and finding help is an important component of mental health. Students were asked whether they got the kind of help they needed when they felt distressed. Only 28.1% of students replied that they got the help they needed. On the other hand, students were also asked who they turned to when they were sad, hopeless, anxious, or otherwise distressed.

- Of the students who reported having such feelings, over 80% indicated that they do have someone who they were likely to talk to.
- Approximately half of the students listed friends as their most likely confidantes.
- Just over one in five listed a parent.
- Only 2% of students listed a teacher or other adult at school.
- Altogether, students were twice as likely to mention a peer (e.g. friend or sibling) as an adult (e.g. parent, teacher or other adult).

# BULLYING

Bullying is a concern for students, educators, and families. Wisconsin's YRBS began tracking in-person bullying in 2009, and cyber bullying in 2011. During that time, there has been no statistically significant increase in high school bullying.

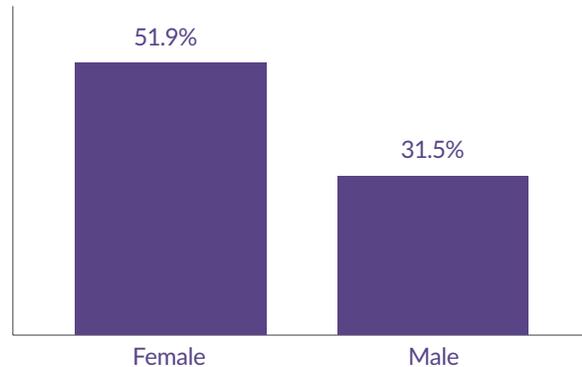
## Experiences of Different Types of Bullying, by Sex



- In-person bullying (24.2%) is still more common than electronic bullying (18.6%).
- Girls, LGBT students, and those with a disability are bullied at higher rates.
- Two out of three students who report online bullying also report being bullied in person.

- Over a third of girls and a quarter of boys report experiencing one of these types of bullying.
- Four out of ten students (41.7%) report that bullying is a problem at their school. Females are more likely than males to say that bullying is a problem (52% vs. 32%).
- Students who report being bullied also report higher rates of experiencing other types of violence, either currently or in the past. They are also more likely to report poor mental health and suicidality.
- Bullying is a significant risk factor for suicide. At the same time, it's important to remember that most students who report being bullied do not report being suicidal.

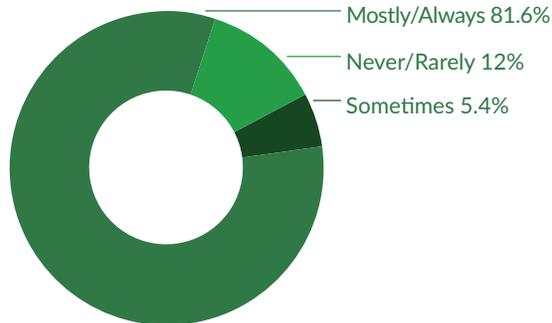
## Percent of Students Who Think Bullying is a Problem, by Sex



# SCHOOL SAFETY

The vast majority of students feel safe at school and go through school without being hurt or threatened, and the overall trend is towards greater school safety.

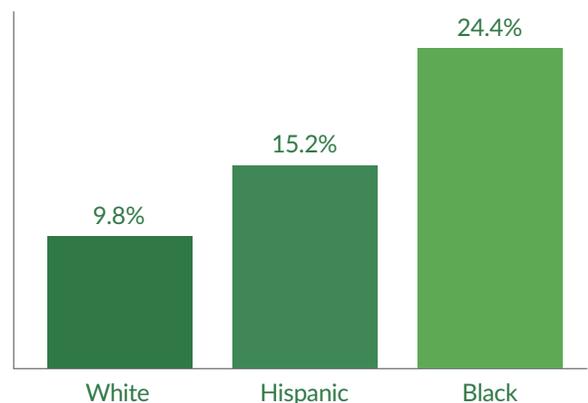
## How Often Students Feel Safe at School



- Four out of five students (81.6%) feel safe at school “Most of the Time” or “Always.”
- A very low percent of students carry weapons at school (5.2%), are threatened with weapons at school (6.9%), or skip school due to safety concerns (6.3%).
- There are decreasing numbers of students who have been in a fight anywhere (20%), a fight on school property (7.3%), threatened or injured with a weapon at school (6.9%), or physically hurt in any way at school (15%).

- In line with those trends, fewer students than in the past (17.1%) agreed that violence was a problem at their school.
- At the same time, not all students feel safe. Interestingly, since 2007 there has been an increase in the percent of students who feel unsafe at school: currently 12%.
- Students from marginalized groups (e.g., racial and sexual minorities) are more likely to feel unsafe at school and to report that violence is a problem at their school. For instance, nearly one in four Black students feel unsafe from physical harm at school, vs. one in 10 white students.
- Students who reported feeling unsafe at school were twice as likely to report fighting at school (13.2% vs. 6.2%). They are also more likely to report other forms of victimization.

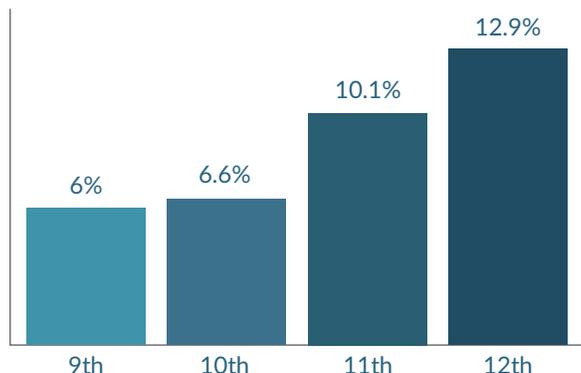
## Percent of Students Who Feel Unsafe at School, by Race/Ethnicity



# SEXUAL AND DATING VIOLENCE

The YRBS includes some safety and victimization questions that are not restricted to the school setting. These include questions on whether a student has ever experienced rape, physical dating violence, or sexual dating violence.

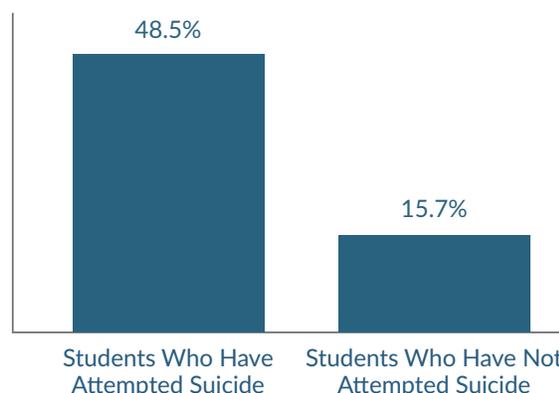
**Percent of Females Who Have Been Raped, by Grade**



- Overall, 7.2% of students report having ever been raped. The rate for males is 5.1% and 8.9% for females.
- More broadly, 10.2% of students report having been forced into any sexual activity: 5.0% of males and 15.0% of females. That is almost one in every seven female students.
- 6.9% of students report having experienced physical dating violence: 4.5% of males and 8.8% of females.

- There are differences by grade level. By the time females hit 12th grade, 12.9% have been raped, 19.1% have experienced any form of sexual violence, and 10.1% have experienced physical dating violence.
- Students who have experienced rape or sexual or physical dating violence are much more likely to be anxious, depressed, and suicidal. For instance, nearly half of students who attempted suicide have experienced such violence. This is three times more than their peers.
- Rates of sexual and dating violence are particularly high for students with physical disabilities or health issues and LGBT students. For instance, almost one in five such students has been raped (18% of students with disabilities and 17.4% of LGBT students).

**Experience of Sexual or Dating Violence Among Students Who Have vs. Have Not Attempted Suicide**

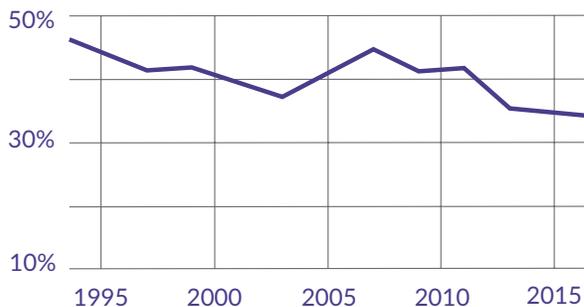


# SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

In line with national trends, Wisconsin students are less likely to have sex than in the past.

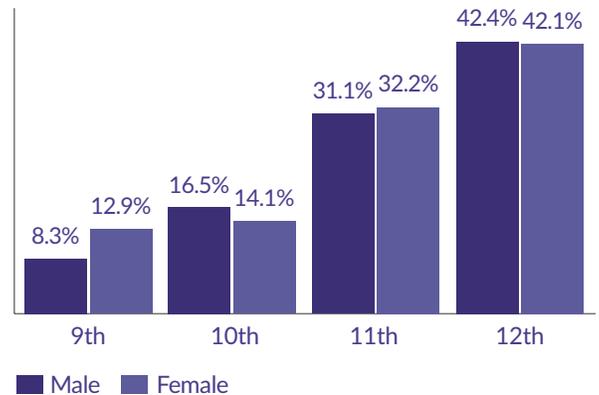
- In 2017 approximately one in three students (33.6%) reported having ever had sex, vs. almost one in two (47%) in 1993.
- Similar percentages of male (34.9%) and female (32.1%) students report ever having had sex.
- Among students who have had sex, the most common age to start was 15 for males and 16 for females.
- Only 2.9% of students reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13. This is down from 7.3% in 1993.
- Students are having sex with fewer partners. In 2017, 7.2% of students reported having 4 or more partners; this is half the 1993 rate.

Percent of Students Who Have Ever Had Sex



- Among students who had sex, approximately 45% had only had one partner; 67% reported between one and two partners.
- The percent of students who are sexually active (i.e., reported having sex in the last three months) has decreased from a high of 32.5% in 1993 to the current rate of 24.9%. The gender and grade level breakdown is shown in the graph below.

Percent of Students Who Are Sexually Active, by Sex and Grade



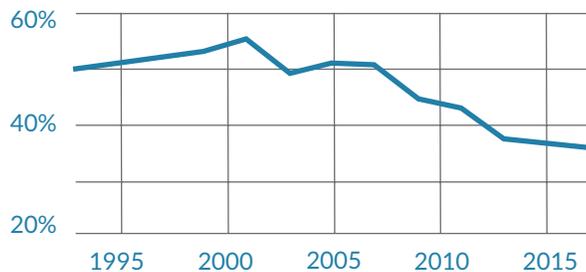
- When students do have sex, they are more likely to use protection. Almost 2/3 (62.8%) used a condom during last sexual intercourse.
- Sexually active students are less likely to be drunk or high. Approximately 17% of sexually active students were under the influence of alcohol or drugs during their last sexual intercourse. This is a decrease from the past.

# ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

The 2017 YRBS showed a continued, notable decline in teen alcohol and drug use. For instance:

- Alcohol use was at its lowest rate ever, with 30.4% of students reporting that they currently drink and 64.5% reporting ever having had a drink. Only 16.4% of students report binge drinking; down from a high of 34.4%.

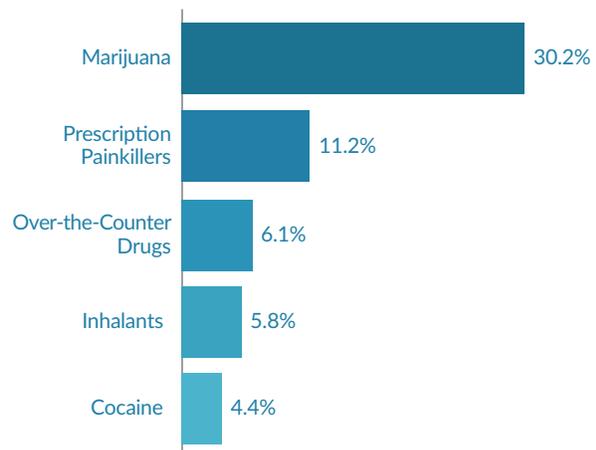
**Percent of Students Who Have Had Alcohol in the Past 30 Days**



- Decreasing numbers of students have ever used cocaine (4.4%), inhalants (5.8%), or abused over-the-counter drugs (6.1%).
- The 2017 survey was the first time students were asked about abuse of prescription painkillers: 11.2% of students reported unauthorized use of such medications.
- The vast majority of students (over 80%) have never used any of the drugs previously described.

- Marijuana use has decreased since 1999. In 2017, 30.2% of students had ever used marijuana (vs. a high of 42.7%) and only 16% currently use it (vs. a high of 25.1%).
- Students who do use alcohol and drugs are starting later than in the past, with only 5.4% of students reporting marijuana use before age 13 and 15.5% reporting first alcohol use before age 13. These rates are approximately half of what they were at their highest.
- Fewer students than in the past (18.4%) have ever been offered or sold drugs at school.
- The downward trends in alcohol and drug use hold for males and females and for all racial and ethnic groups<sup>5</sup>.

**Percent of Students Who Have Used the Following Substances to Get High**

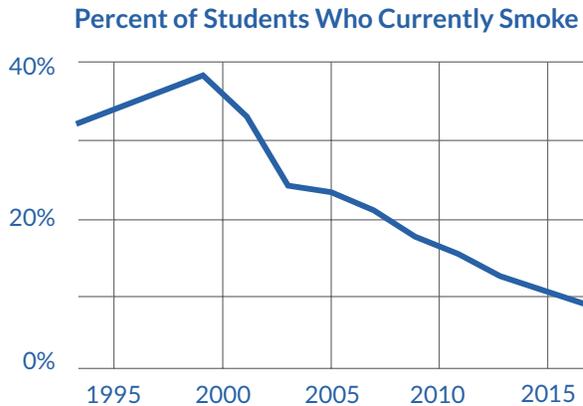


<sup>5</sup>The raw usage numbers are down across all racial groups. Not all of the decreases are statistically significant; however, this may be due to the relatively small sample size of some racial minority groups.

# TOBACCO

As with alcohol and other drugs, tobacco use has declined precipitously. For instance:

- Only 7.8% of students currently smoke cigarettes at all, and only 2.3% smoke frequently.

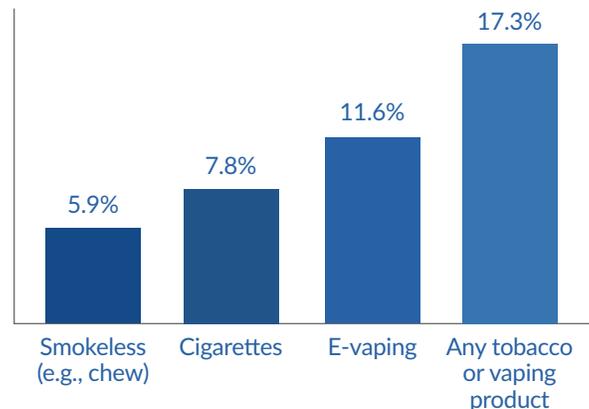


- The 2017 survey was the first time students were asked about electronic vaping products: 11.6% of students reported such use. That is comparable to the rate of cigarette smoking in 2013 (the high of cigarette smoking was 38.1%).

- Vaping was highest for whites, males, and older students. For instance, almost a quarter (22.7%) of 12th grade males vape, vs. only 6.1% of 9th grade males and 5.1% of 9th grade females.
- 17.3% of students currently use any tobacco or vaping product (e.g., chew, cigars, cigarettes or e-vaping products).

In general, tobacco, alcohol, and drug use are higher among students who report traumatic experiences or marginalized status. This is in line with national research indicating that drug and alcohol use is one common response to trauma and toxic stress.

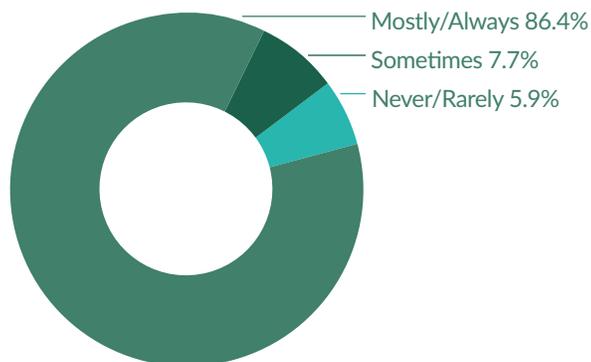
## Percent of Students Who Currently Use Tobacco or Nicotine Products



# TRAFFIC SAFETY

Both national data and Wisconsin's YRBS show positive trends with regard to traffic safety. While traffic deaths are down in part due to fewer young people spending time behind the wheel, it's also true that when young people do drive, they are better at taking certain precautions.

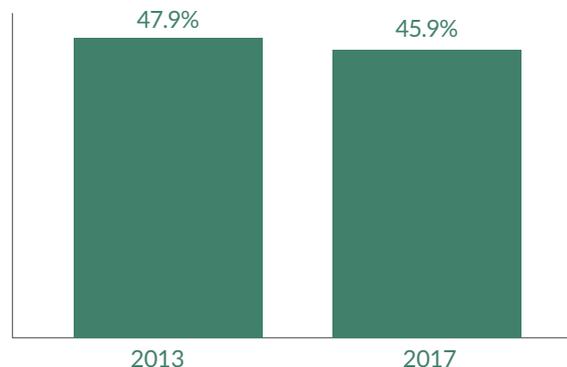
## How Often Students Wear Seat Belts



- More than 4 out of 5 students (86.4%) use seat belts most of the time or always.
- Seat belt use does vary by race and ethnicity: students of color are more than two-and-a-half times as likely to say that they rarely or never wear seatbelts (10.8% vs. 4.1%).
- 17.4% of students reported having ridden in a car with a driver (of any age) who had been drinking.

- Only 5.5% of students reported having driven under the influence of alcohol.
- Males in 12th grade reported the highest rates of driving under the influence (13.9%).
- Just under half (45.7%) of student drivers reported texting or emailing while behind the wheel.
- Rates were highest for older students: among 12th graders, 60% of males and 63% of females reported texting or emailing while driving.
- Texting while driving rates have remained almost the same since the question was first asked in 2013.

## Percent of Student Drivers Who Text While Driving

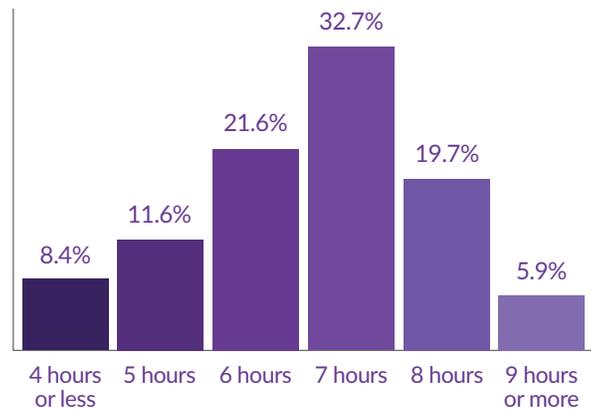


# PHYSICAL HEALTH

Despite some improvements in nutrition and alcohol and drug use, fewer students report feeling healthy. This may be related to decreased sleep, increased screen time, and decreased mental health. Compared to the past:

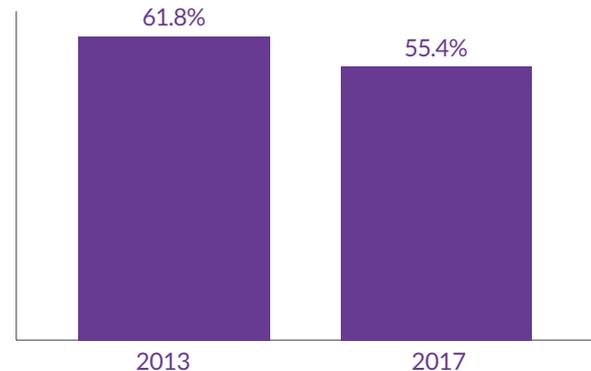
- The number of students attending a physical education class daily (36.9%) or weekly (50.8%) is steady from recent years.
- Students' general activity levels are fairly steady, with only about one in four students (24.7%) reporting an hour of physical activity every day.
- While the number of overweight students remains steady (15.0%), there was a slight increase in the percentage who are obese (13.7%).
- Daily consumption of caffeinated drinks, juices, sodas, and other sugary drinks is fairly low (9%-16%).
- Fewer students report drinking soda or juices than in the past.
- Within a week, 90% of students eat fruit and 93% eat vegetables.
- There has been a slight increase in the number of students who always go without breakfast (14.1%).

**Average Hours of Sleep Per Night  
(Percent of Students)**



- One in four (25.6%) of students got eight or more hours of sleep per night. More than 40% sleep six or fewer hours per night.
- 40.3% of students reported three or more hours per day on their phones or other screens.
- Overall, just over half of students (55.4%) report that their health is excellent or good. This is a decrease from previous years.

**Students in "Excellent" or "Very Good" Health**



# WISCONSIN TRENDS SUMMARY (1993-2017)

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Below is a summary of key long-term trends, as compiled by CDC<sup>6</sup>. Only questions with statistically significant changes are provided here; others are excluded.

## Alcohol

- ↓ Ever drank
- ↓ First drink before age 13
- ↓ Current alcohol use
- ↓ Binge drinking

## Tobacco

- ↓ Ever tried
- ↓ Currently smoke

## Other Drugs

- ↓ Ever tried marijuana
- ↓ Current use of marijuana
- ↓ Tried marijuana before age 13
- ↓ Ever used cocaine or inhalants
- ↓ Ever abused over-the-counter drugs
- ↓ Were offered, sold or given drugs on school property

## Traffic Safety

- ↓ Rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol
- ↓ Drove a car under the influence of alcohol
- ↑ Seat belt use

## Sexual Behaviors

- ↑ Postponing first sexual intercourse
- ↓ Ever had sex
- ↓ Currently sexually active
- ↓ Multiple sexual partners
- ↓ Large age difference between partners
- ↓ Used alcohol or drugs before last sexual intercourse
- ↑ Used a condom

## School Safety

- ↓ Threatened or injured with a weapon on school property
- ↓ Physically hurt at school
- ↓ See violence as a problem at school
- ↑ Regularly feel unsafe at school (small but growing group)
- ↓ In a physical fight

## Mental Health and Suicide

- ↑ Feeling sad or hopeless (up since 2009)
- ↑ Seriously considered suicide (up since 2011)
- ↑ Made a plan (up since 2007)
- ↓ Attempted (down from 1999, no change since 2007)

## Weight and Nutrition

- ↑ Obese (by body mass index)
- ↑ Ate fruit
- ↓ Drank soda
- ↑ Went without breakfast

## Other Health Issues

- ↓ Say health is excellent or good
- ↓ Get 8 hours of sleep
- ↓ TV use
- ↑ Other screen time
- ↑ Use sunscreen

<sup>6</sup>See 2017 [YRBS Results WI High School Trend Analysis Report](#). While all of these questions are analyzed in a report dating back to 1993, note that not all questions have been in the survey since 1993.

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