

Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2012
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE YRBS

1. Why does Emerson Hospital sponsor the Youth Risk Behavior Survey?

The Emerson Hospital Community Benefits Program has a strong track record of developing collaborative efforts with the communities it serves. Emerson has carried out a comprehensive community health needs assessment, developed partnerships with different groups to address public health issues and leveraged other resources. Begun in 1997, Emerson is now partnering with nine school districts to develop and implement the Emerson Hospital YRBS as a means of improving the health status of young people in our community. Having successfully implemented seven surveys of over 8,000 students each year, this coordinated initiative continues Emerson's objectives of supporting health education programming in the school districts and positive and responsive programs in the community.

2. Can parents exempt their children from the survey?

Yes. Parents/guardians may request to have their daughter/son exempt from taking the survey. When letters are sent home, parents are asked to notify the principal before the survey date. In the past, very few parents have chosen this option.

3. Can parents see the survey before it is administered?

Yes. Parents may contact the YRBS coordinator to make arrangements to review the surveys in the school office. The survey cannot be copied or taken from the building. This step is taken so that the information about the survey is not available in the community before its administration. If the information was released early, the results of the survey could be affected.

4. Will the survey questions encourage students to engage in the behaviors?

Research shows that asking questions on a survey such as this do not encourage or increase the likelihood that a student will engage in risky behaviors. Research also indicates that teaching and talking about risky behaviors does not result in engaging in those behaviors. The survey is designed so that students always have the option to respond that they do not participate in a particular behavior.

5. How is the survey data used?

The data provides the school district and the community with a profile of healthy and risky behaviors. The data is used to inform the health education curriculum in the school district and can be used to develop community-based prevention and intervention initiatives, including parent education and involvement.

6. How is the information reported (e.g. grade level, gender)?

A survey consultant compiles and analyzes the data. The data is then presented in multiple formats, including by grade level, by gender, and behavior over time. The varied format provides a more comprehensive picture of health and risk behaviors in the community.

7. How is the survey administered?

School districts conduct the survey (taking roughly 45 minutes or less) during the second week of March. Typically a district selects one day during that week, and where possible, other districts will choose the same day and time. This helps minimize discussion about the survey, which might affect results. Teachers administering the survey have a script so that all students have the same directions about taking the survey. Teachers are also asked to refrain from answering questions about the survey and its content. This allows us to measure as objectively as possible.

8. Do all students take the survey or just a small sample?

All students in grades 6, 8, and 9 through 12 take the survey unless they have been excluded because of a parent's request, absence from school, or choose not to participate. Because we survey all students and not a sample, the validity of the survey is increased.

9. How is a student's privacy ensured?

The YRBS is an anonymous survey. The administering teacher collects surveys immediately after its administration and returns them to a central location for pick up by the survey consultant.

10. How do you know that the students are being truthful when taking the survey?

By comparing our survey results to the State survey and tracking responses over time, we are confident about the general honesty of the respondents. Further, many steps are put in place to minimize error. All administering teachers read the same instructions to students and do not answer student questions about the survey while it is being administered. All students take the survey on the same day and at the same time whenever possible. Additionally, the surveys are reviewed before they are processed and surveys that are clearly not accurate (e.g. same response circled for every question) are removed. Both the state and the Emerson YRBS survey are based on a model from the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which has proven to be statistically valid. Finally, research indicates that anonymous, self-report data provides an accurate picture of behavior.