

# 2025 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey Fact Sheet

## **What is the purpose of the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS)?**

The MWAHS is a valuable effort dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of youth in the 25 communities making up the MetroWest region and several communities beyond. The MWAHS gathers timely and important data on the health and risk behaviors of students in the middle and high school grades, with a goal of informing data-driven efforts to keep students healthy and safe. The first administration of the MWAHS took place in 2006, and the survey is administered every other year so that trends in health-related behaviors can be tracked over time at the community and regional levels. The effort is funded by the [MetroWest Health Foundation](#) in Framingham, MA.

## **How are the results used?**

The survey data is used to set priorities for addressing the health needs of students, and to improve health education, prevention, and other programs in your community. The data also highlights emerging trends and measures local progress towards reducing risk behaviors and improving student health. Your school will receive its own data so that the results can be used at the local level. In addition, comparisons of your school with the MetroWest region are provided.

## **What does the MWAHS measure?**

The survey asks questions about student health behaviors and attitudes to inform local prevention and education efforts. Many questions are drawn from the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS) developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These survey questions have been tested to ensure they are developmentally appropriate and will yield valid data. Topics include unintentional and intentional injuries; violence and bullying (including cyberbullying); tobacco, alcohol, and other substance use; mental health; sexual behaviors (high school survey only); and physical activity. Additional questions on the survey address local concerns, including digital media use, stress and anxiety, and nicotine vaping. They also assess protective factors that support positive youth development, like adult support and school connectedness.

## **Who takes the survey?**

Students in grades 7-12 in more than 20 MetroWest communities served by the MetroWest Health Foundation, as well as several communities outside of the MetroWest region, take the survey. In most school districts, 6<sup>th</sup> grade students are also included.

## **Are parents notified of the survey? Is the survey voluntary?**

The answer is “yes” to both questions. Notifications about the survey are sent to all parents and guardians in advance of the survey using the school’s normal means of parent communication. Parents are given clear information on how to ask questions about the survey, how to view a copy if they wish to do so, and how to opt out their child(ren) from participation if they choose to do so. Individual students may also choose not to participate, to skip any question that they do not wish to answer, or to stop participating at any time.

### **How is the survey administered?**

The survey is administered in the classroom setting by teachers, who are provided with instructions to ensure that student anonymity and privacy are protected. 2025 is the third time that the survey will be administered in an online format.

### **Is the survey anonymous?**

Yes. Survey administration procedures have been designed to protect student privacy and allow for anonymous participation. Students are not asked to provide any identifying information, and there is no way to link a student's responses with their identity. Each student is randomly given a code to access the survey, but that is in no way linked to their identity. The purpose of the survey code is to make sure each student only completes the survey once and can pick up where they left off in case of an interruption.

### **Does the survey encourage students to engage in risky behaviors?**

There is no evidence that simply asking students about health risk behaviors will encourage them to try those behaviors. The influences and causes of adolescent risk behaviors are very complex. Students are exposed frequently to information about tobacco, alcohol, other drug use, violence, and sexuality through the media, parents, friends, and the broader community. Exposure to a small number of survey questions on any one topic is highly unlikely to cause a change in behavior, either good or bad.

### **How do we know that students tell the truth?**

An extensive body of research indicates that youth respond truthfully to surveys when they perceive the survey is important and know procedures have been developed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous and voluntary participation. In fact, data of this nature may be gathered as credibly from adolescents as from adults. Internal reliability checks help identify the very small percentage of students who may falsify their answers (typically less than 1%).

### **Who conducts the survey?**

[Education Development Center](#), a nonprofit organization in Waltham, MA, is funded by the MetroWest Health Foundation to implement the MWAHS. EDC has led the MWAHS initiative since its inception in 2006 and is committed to ensuring smooth survey administration and high-quality reporting of the data. For more information about EDC, please see: <http://www.edc.org/>.

### **Who do I contact for more information?**

For questions related to the MWAHS administration at your school or to view findings from prior surveys, please contact your school principal or the survey coordinator at your school. You may also view regional summary findings from the survey at [Metrowest Health Foundation | Foundation Publications](#) (scroll to section on "Adolescent Health").