

Adding Optional Questions to the 2009 YRBS

Beginning with the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), we would propose adding two additional CDC-approved optional questions regarding sexual orientation. The questions would be:

1. During your life, with whom have you had sexual contact?
 - A. I have never had sexual contact
 - B. Females
 - C. Males
 - D. Females and males

2. Which of the following best describes you?
 - A. Heterosexual (straight)
 - B. Gay or lesbian
 - C. Bisexual
 - D. Not sure

Currently the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin include these questions on their state YRBS. Several cities including Boston, Milwaukee, New York City, and Chicago also ask these questions on their surveys.

Beginning in 2003, Chicago Public Schools began incorporating these questions into its YRBS. 6.3 percent of their students surveyed described themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. 8.5 percent of their students reported some same sex contact.

Chicago surveys in 2003, 2005, and 2007 have shown several differential risk factors for LGB youth. Most notably, students who described themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual were more likely to report missing school because they felt unsafe, being involved in a physical fight at school, and being the victim of sexual assault. As a result, many LGB students resort to unhealthy, negative, and sometimes fatal coping strategies. LGB students are more likely to report being depressed, to have attempted suicide, and to engage in drug and alcohol use. Below are some YRBS questions showing the behavior rates of LGB youth compared to that of other students:

YRBS Question	LGB Identified	All Other Students
Carried a weapon to school	15%	5%
Skipped school because felt unsafe	33%	11%
Physical fight	57%	40%
Sexual assault	26%	8%
Depression	52%	31%
Attempted suicide	32%	11%
Tobacco use (ever)	82%	62%
Regular alcohol use	64%	43%
Marijuana use	62%	45%
Cocaine use	21%	5%
Inhalants use	16%	7%
Ecstasy use	21%	4%
Bought drugs at school	62%	37%
Lifetime sex	83%	54%
4+ sexual partners	42%	19%
Went without eating for a whole day	33%	11%
Bulimic practices	13%	4%

These differential risk factors point out the need for acquiring LGB student data on our statewide YRBS. By having both Chicago data and comparable data for the rest of Illinois, we will be able to merge the data sets and generate a YRBS report representative of the state as a whole. This data will have significant relevance to school district administrators for policy development. This information will also be beneficial in targeting our health education efforts statewide.