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## **Fewer teens use tobacco and alcohol; many need support for depressive feelings**

*Healthy Youth Survey explores attitudes and behaviors among 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders*

**OLYMPIA** — Fewer students are smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol, according to a recent survey of kids in our state. At the same time, a large number of students seriously considered suicide in the past year. The number of secondary school students who believe using marijuana is risky dropped to the lowest level since the state started collecting data.

The Healthy Youth Survey is taken every two years by students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 in more than 1,000 public schools in Washington. More than 200,000 youth took part in the survey in October 2012 by answering a wide variety of questions about their health and health behaviors. All responses were voluntary and anonymous. The Healthy Youth Survey provides communities with needed information to make solid decisions about which health issues to focus on.

“The physical and emotional health of our youth is crucial to their success in school, in work, in personal relationships, and in their communities,” said Department of Social and Health Services Secretary Kevin W. Quigley. “It’s good to celebrate that fewer teens are using alcohol and tobacco, but it’s clear many teens need more support from the adults in their lives and from friends to make healthy choices and cope with challenges.”

Survey results show that cigarette smoking is down in all grades. About 10 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported smoking a cigarette at least once in the past 30 days. That’s down from nearly 13 percent in 2010 and from 25 percent in 1999. Statewide, about 50,000 youth smoke – and 40 start smoking every day. Youth also use other tobacco products such as cigars or chew. Nearly as many 10<sup>th</sup> graders smoked tobacco from a hookah pipe as from a cigarette, and about 7 percent said that they smoked a cigar in the last month.

“We’re certainly encouraged to see that fewer kids are smoking cigarettes,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “In fact, smoking rates are half what they were a decade ago. I’m proud of our tobacco prevention and control work. It has truly made a difference in the health of Washington kids. Still, we’re seeing many teens using other types of tobacco, and using multiple substances, so there’s more work to do.”

Preventing underage drinking has been a statewide priority for the last decade, and nearly 11,000 fewer students are using alcohol compared to 2010. Still, with more than 115,000 youth who currently drink, the need for prevention efforts continues. Survey results show that 12 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 23 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 36 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders used alcohol in the past 30 days. Another concern is that the percentage of Washington 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders who smoke marijuana is nearly double the percentage of cigarette smokers.

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## Healthy Youth Survey

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“I’m pleased that underage drinking is trending downward,” said Liquor Control Board Chair Sharon Foster. “However, this past year’s privatization of liquor has more than quadrupled the number of outlets selling spirits. With the potential for increased youth access, it’s more important than ever for parents to [talk with their kids](#) about alcohol.”

Challenges remain in other areas. About 8 percent of 8th and 10th graders attempted suicide in the past year. Over 100,000 youth, ages 12-17, seriously considered suicide – about one in every six students. More than one in four teens surveyed said they felt so sad or hopeless for two weeks in a row that they stopped doing usual activities: 26 percent in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 31 percent in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and 30 percent in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These numbers haven’t changed much over the past 10 years.

At the same time, students across all grades reported an increase in their “commitment to school,” and fewer are skipping school. “Teachers and school administrators have done a great job in creating safe and supportive learning environments for our students,” said Randy Dorn, Superintendent of Public Instruction. “More of them report they feel safe, enjoy being at school, and have opportunities to become involved in school-related activities. When students feel safe and are committed to school, they’re more likely to succeed.”

Healthy and safe school environments help support Washington’s workforce needs. “The Healthy Youth Survey helps communities serve youth in a way that will ensure Washington businesses have the workforce they need,” said Brian Bonlender, director of the Washington State Department of Commerce. “Keeping students healthy and safe strengthens our schools and helps keep students engaged, so they graduate with skills that support businesses and our economy.”

Recently added questions about sexual health help inform effective prevention programs. Nearly one third (32 percent) of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and more than half (55 percent) of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported having ever had sexual intercourse. About 7 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 16 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported they had four or more sexual partners. About 6 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 5 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported having sex for the first time at age 12 or younger.

The survey is a joint effort of the Department of Health, Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Liquor Control Board, the Family Policy Council, and the Department of Commerce. Results are used to plan, implement, and evaluate state youth programs. [Survey results](#) are available online. [Survey fact sheets](#) are also online.

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