

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey was administered to ACPS students in grades 7-12 in April 2007. A preliminary report provided a list of all survey items with response option percentages by total sample, gender, grade and race/ethnicity subgroups. This report focuses on analyzing indicators established by the Centers for Disease Control for each of the priority health risk behaviors begun during adolescence that result in the most significant mortality, morbidity, disability and social problems in youth and adults.

Key highlights from the results are:

- Some of the most prevalent health risk behaviors for Alexandria youth included:
  - Excessive television viewing (3+ hrs/day)
  - Sexual activity
  - Alcohol use
  - Physical fighting
  - Riding with a driver who had been drinking
- Although alcohol was the most common illegal substance used by young people in Alexandria, its prevalence was less common than in the national comparison high school sample.
- Five in ten high school youth and three in ten middle school youth have had sexual intercourse. Condom use, among sexually active youth, was high, especially among Black youth.
- Cigarette use was less prevalent than marijuana use. Cigarette use was more common in the national sample, while marijuana use was similar to the national sample.
- Gender differences confirmed typical sex-stereotypes. Girls were more likely to describe themselves as overweight and trying to lose weight, although BMI calculations did not indicate they were more likely to be overweight. Girls were also less likely to get recommended amounts of physical activity or to play on a sports team. Boys were more likely to engage in violent behaviors and have more sexual partners, while girls were more likely to report sad and hopeless feelings.
- Behaviors in all core areas of health varied between ethnic subgroups, with the exception of mental health behaviors. Asian youth generally had the lowest incidence of risk behaviors. White youth reported more tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use, but also the most positive physical health behaviors. Black and Hispanic youth were more likely to be sexually active.
- Three in ten youth were engaging in no risk behaviors, while another three in ten were engaging in 2-4 risk behaviors.

Research indicates that most of the risk behaviors engaged in by adolescents are preventable. Prevention and intervention programs are important to reduce the incidence of these behaviors, however these efforts must be complemented with a community wide initiative to create an environment that fosters healthy options and choices for all youth in all neighborhoods and cultural niches. The next step for the community is to determine local health objectives, establish targets, determine appropriate actions to achieve those goals and what persons and agencies will be accountable. Strategies that capitalize on existing community organizations efforts and involve multiple influences are more likely to succeed.