

2023 Healthy Youth Survey results offer signs of hope and resiliency among youth in Kitsap County and across the state!

The statewide 2023 Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) results are now available, representing the voices of over 217,000 Washington students in grades 6-12. The survey focuses on the health and wellbeing of young people. In 2023, students reported improved health behaviors and mental health along with increased social support.

While concerns remain, the findings suggest positive changes in adolescent health and wellbeing. These results are an opportunity to carry this momentum forward and continue focusing on prevention and resiliency among youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a large decrease, roughly 50%, in most youth substance use. While the long-term impacts are unknown, in 2023 we see that substance use has mostly remained stable, both in Washington and nationally, according to the 2023 HYS and Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys.

The use rates in Kitsap County are the same or lower on most measures.

For example: Comparing 10th graders in Washington State and in Kitsap County:

- 9% reported current alcohol use in WA State and in **Kitsap County -4.7%**
- 8% reported current cannabis use in WA State and in **Kitsap County – 5.2%**
- 8% reported current vaping in WA State and **Kitsap County – is also at 8%.**
-

An exception to this stable trend were increases in misuse of prescription drugs, pain killers, and other illegal drugs compared to 2021. While representing a relatively small proportion of students overall (each under 3%), these findings show more prevention work is needed.

Mental health outcomes among 10th graders are improving, but remain highly concerning, especially for youth who already face more barriers to mental health support. According to the new data, depressive feelings and contemplation or planning suicide significantly decreased from 2021 to 2023. Even so, in WA 30% and in Kitsap-36% feel sad or hopeless. 10th graders reported persistent depressive feelings, in WA nearly 15% and 19% in Kitsap reported contemplating suicide. There is work to be done here. While this is an unacceptable level of youth struggling with suicidal thoughts, it is also the lowest rate we have seen in Washington in 20 years.

The same improving trends seen among youth in general were also seen among sexually or gender-diverse (LGBTQ+) youth and those reporting a disability. However, many of these students still experience far higher levels of mental health issues. Depressive feelings were nearly two times higher for students who identify as female compared to male, more than two times higher for LGBTQ+ youth, and three times higher among students identifying as having a disability.

“We hope to leverage these positive trends in the 2023 survey to close disparity gaps where they exist in communities throughout our state. We want to ensure we continue to see positive trends for years to come for all families and communities. It is important to maintain focus on adolescent substance use and mental health, while also using prevention strategies to address other challenges facing young people including disordered eating and violence” adds Michael Langer, Assistant Director at the Washington State Health Care Authority.

Additionally, 10th graders report significant increases in social support. Compared to 2021, more students reported:

- Having adults to turn to when feeling depressed WA -50% in 2021 vs. 59% in 2023 (Kitsap - 59.7%).
- Having people from school who would help them in WA - 72% in 2021 vs. 77% in 2023) (Kitsap - 76%).
- Receiving information from their school about the warning signs of suicide in WA - 47% in 2021 vs. 56% in 2023 (Kitsap – 60%).

WA State and Kitsap County agencies are encouraged by the tremendous work being done, especially by students, during challenging times. Students took the time to provide important information about their lives and this will guide the implementation of prevention and health promotion initiatives. To these students, their families, and the communities that continue to offer supportive environments, we thank you!

The Washington State Health Care Authority, Washington State Department of Health, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Liquor and Cannabis Board collaborate on the biennial HYS. Student participation is voluntary and anonymous. The last survey was conducted in 2021, and 2023 marked the 18th statewide youth survey in Washington.

Visit [Home - Healthy Youth Survey \(askhys.net\)](https://askhys.net) to access resources, explore the data dashboard, propose new or modified survey questions for 2025, learn about survey process, or how to advocate for your child's school to participate in the next round.

Additional information and resources are available from Kitsap County's Substance Abuse Prevention & Youth Services <http://Kcowa.us/prevention> #kitsapcounty #youth #prevention.