

2010 Chatham County Youth Health Behavior Report

Executive Summary

Introduction and Methods

In the Spring of 2010, the Chatham County Public Health Department and Chatham County Schools partnered to survey 6th-12th grade students about their health behaviors and attitudes. This survey was conducted in conjunction with the 2010 Chatham County Community Health Assessment, which the Chatham County Public Health Department completes every four years to ensure that their work stays focused on current community needs. Students were surveyed online using the Chatham County Youth Health Behavior Survey tool, a modified version of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The survey included questions covering four main areas of youth health: nutrition and physical activity, safety and violence, substance abuse, and sexual health.

Overall, 2539 6th-12th grade students participated in the 2010 Chatham County Youth Health Behavior Survey (CCYHBS), representing all Chatham County schools that serve grades 6-12. Because of the data collection and analysis process, the data presented in the Chatham County Youth Health Behavior Report truly reflect only those students who participated in the survey. Given these limitations, however, these data do present a sketch of what the county's youth as a whole may be doing and thinking about their health.

Overall, the data collected suggest that the percentage of youth engaging in health and risk behaviors in Chatham County is similar to the prevalence of these behaviors among students in North Carolina and in the United States as a whole. Some areas show possible differences, but there is no one area in which a far greater number of Chatham County students report risk behaviors as compared to parallel data for the state or nation.

Obesity and Related Behaviors

Childhood obesity and related behaviors such as nutrition behaviors and levels of physical activity, are of major interest and concern to communities around the country. Childhood obesity has been on the rise, and according to data from the 2010 CCYHBS, a slightly higher percentage of students in Chatham County may be overweight as compared to state and national data. More of Chatham County's students report higher levels of physical activity as compared to the state and nation, however less students report eating the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. Additionally, slightly more of the Chatham County students who participated in the 2010 CCYHBS reported drinking soda than students in the state and nation. With changes being made throughout the county to increase opportunities for physical activity, including the opening of new parks and the inception of new school-based physical activity promotion programs, we will hope to see a leveling off or downward trend to the childhood obesity rate in the years to come.

Injury and Violence

Injury and violence are of concern because they are the leading causes of death among young people state wide and nationwide. In terms of injury prevention and violence related behaviors, data from the county compare favorably to data from North Carolina and the United States. Fewer Chatham County students participating in the 2010 CCYHBS reported rarely or never wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle compared to students in the state and nation. The percentage of Chatham County middle school students who report riding with a driver who had been drinking is less than the state prevalence of this behavior, and the percentage of Chatham County high school students who report riding with a driver who had been drinking is less than the nationwide prevalence. The percentage of Chatham County high school students who report considering and attempting suicide also lies below state and national prevalence.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse can have adverse short and long-term health impacts on youth. According to the 2010 CCYHBS, it seems that overall, Chatham County students are engaging in less substance abuse than their counterparts in the state and the nation. Most notably, the percentage of students who reported abusing prescription drugs in Chatham County is far less than in the state. The percentage of students who report alcohol use in the past month also falls below the state and national level. One area in which Chatham County is lagging, however, is in tobacco use. Chatham County students' tobacco use may be slightly above the prevalence in North Carolina, while about the same as students nationwide.

Sexual Health and Risk Behaviors

Because of the health and social impact of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, sexual risk behaviors among youth are of concern to public health and to the community. The prevalence of sexual risk factors among Chatham County students seems to be about average in comparison to the state and nation; on many indicators, the county places slightly higher than the national prevalence but slightly lower than the state prevalence. This is the case for the percentage of high school students who report ever having sexual intercourse, the percentage of high school students who report initiating sexual intercourse before the age of 13, and the percentage of high school students who report more than four sexual partners over their lifetimes. On a positive note in terms of sexual risk reduction, a great majority of Chatham County high school students reported using a condom during their last sexual encounter. Additionally, the adolescent pregnancy rate in Chatham County ranks in the lowest third of North Carolina counties.

Conclusion

In regards to health-related behaviors of youth overall, Chatham County seems to rank slightly better than average when compared to North Carolina and the United States. There are still plenty of students engaging in risky behaviors, however and a couple of areas in particular in which the county could improve. The Chatham County Public Health Department, Chatham County Schools, and multiple community-based organizations are already working in many of these areas and will use the data presented above to guide their future work and continued

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collaboration. Hopefully these efforts will improve the lives of all of Chatham County's young people, and keep Chatham County a safe and healthy place to grow up.