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PRESS RELEASE

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New results from 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveal a sharp rise in vaping and suicide attempts, plus other challenges and some improvements for Alaska adolescents

May 21, 2020 ANCHORAGE — Alaska’s most recent survey of almost 2,000 high school students statewide shows a significant increase in the percentage of students vaping, feeling sad and hopeless, and attempting suicide.

The results are from the 2019 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) released by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) this week. The findings come from questions answered anonymously and voluntarily by high school students to measure many health and social behaviors. The data help to raise awareness of the struggles that Alaska’s high school students face, identify emerging health concerns, track changes over time and inform strategies to help improve the health and well-being of adolescents in Alaska.

Specifically, the survey found that 1 out of 4 adolescents vaped during the past 30 days. This is a significant increase from the 1 in 6 high school students who reported currently using e-cigarettes during the last survey in 2017. During the past year, more than 1 out of 3 felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or longer, and 1 out of 5 attempted suicide, according to the YRBS results.

Some of the findings were positive. The percentage of adolescents who smoke cigarettes fell from 18% in 2007 to 8% in 2019.

“Over the past 10 years, we’ve seen a significant decrease in the percentage of high school students smoking, which is great news for the health of Alaska kids — today and for years to come,” said Dr. Andrea Fenaughty, senior epidemiologist for the Alaska Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. “During that same time, however, we’ve seen a large increase in students using e-cigarettes. When using these devices, teens breathe in chemicals and nicotine. This nicotine is damaging to their developing brains, and it’s addictive. Our Tobacco Prevention and Control Program is focusing its efforts on improving education about vaping for teens and their parents, and supporting strategies to prevent use and help quitting.”

Alcohol use among high school students has also significantly decreased, from 40% in 2007 to 21% in 2019.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the YRBS, which is conducted every other year nationally and in most states. DHSS administers the survey, which is anonymous, voluntary and conducted with parental consent.

More details can be found in the most recent issue of the Alaska Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [newsletter](#) and the newly published [2019 YRBS Highlights](#).

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