



ADOLESCENT BEHAVIORS AND EXPERIENCES SURVEY (ABES) FACT SHEET FOR SCHOOLS

To assess student risk behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to help understand the pandemic's impact on youth, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is conducting the national Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey (ABES) in spring 2021. This fact sheet answers important questions about the ABES.



What is the purpose of the ABES?

The purpose of the ABES is to gather nationally representative data for students in grades 9 through 12 on the impact of the pandemic and on priority health risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of mortality and morbidity during both youth and adulthood. ABES topics include: (1) students' experiences during the pandemic, (2) behaviors that result in unintentional injuries and violence, (3) tobacco use, (4) alcohol and other drug use, (5) sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancies, (6) unhealthy dietary behaviors, and (7) physical inactivity.

Why is the ABES conducted?

CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health is responsible for identifying and monitoring factors that may affect the health of our Nation's youth. CDC will use the results from the ABES to develop tools and resources for communities and schools to use in their pandemic recovery efforts.

Is this voluntary? What if school districts, schools, or students do not choose to participate?

Participation in the ABES is voluntary. However, to develop accurate national estimates that will provide valuable insight into the current and emerging trends of youth engagement in risky behaviors, participation rates must be high. Selected schools and students cannot be replaced.

Are sensitive questions asked?

Yes. Some questions may be considered sensitive. HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are major health problems. Sexual intercourse and injection drug use are among the behaviors known to increase the risk of HIV or other STDs. The only way to determine if adolescents are at risk of becoming infected with HIV or other STDs is to ask questions about these behaviors. Attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, weapon-carrying and COVID-related experiences also may be considered sensitive topics. Questions are presented in a straightforward manner and the survey is designed to protect student anonymity, thus reducing any uneasiness about answering questions considered sensitive. Also, if students are not comfortable answering a question, they may leave it blank.



How long does it take to complete the survey? Is there some sort of physical test?

The survey takes approximately 20-35 minutes to complete. It has 110 multiple-choice questions. The survey does not include a physical test or exam.

What types of schools are included in the sample?

The ABES will be administered to students in grades 9-12. This includes students from public, Catholic, and private schools with one or more grades in this range (e.g., K-12, 7-12, 9-12, or 10-12).

When is the survey conducted? When are results available?

The ABES will be conducted only once, in January through May 2021. A report summarizing the results will be published the following year. All participating school districts and schools will be notified when the report is available for download.



Is student participation anonymous? How is student privacy protected?

Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy and allow for anonymous participation. Teachers are not involved directly. The survey is administered via an internet-connected device provided by the student or the school. Students log into the secure survey URL using a randomly generated access code. Students will not be asked to provide their names on the survey. Published reports will not identify participating counties, cities, school districts, schools, or students.



Do students take the survey more than once to see how their behaviors change?

No. The ABES will be administered only once, so there is no opportunity for students or schools to be selected for participation again later in this study.



What is the sample size and how are schools selected?

A random sample of approximately 350 schools has been selected to participate in the ABES. The probability of a school being selected is based on enrollment in grades 9-12. One or two classes (about 25 to 50 students) in each of grades 9 through 12 are picked randomly to take part in each selected school.

What is done to maximize student participation?

CDC provides information to school administrators explaining the importance of the ABES that can be shared with teachers, parents, and students. It is helpful if the school's contact person is able to make decisions regarding survey arrangements for their school.



How is the ABES coordinated at each school? What role does school staff play?

It is preferable to have a single contact person in each school. This can be the principal, another administrator, a teacher, or someone else designated by the principal. The school contact provides a list of class sections for selection, distributes parental permission forms to teachers of the sampled classes, follows up to ensure permission forms have been distributed to students, and helps to promote the survey in the school by achieving a high participation rate among students. Teachers assist with distributing parental permission forms, providing the survey URL and login instructions to students, and encouraging eligible students to complete the survey.

What do the schools receive for participating in the ABES?

As a token of appreciation for contributing their time and support and for being a significant partner in the 2021 ABES effort, the CDC will provide each participating school with a monetary school award. One option is to use these funds for prevention curriculum and educational materials. However, no restrictions will be placed on how schools can use these funds.



Who is the survey contractor for the ABES?

ICF, a nationally recognized survey research company in Rockville, Maryland, has been contracted by CDC to work with school districts and schools to obtain clearance, select a sample of students, host the web-based survey, distribute survey materials, and collect student data.

Whom may I call to obtain additional information and/or arrange for my school to participate?

To obtain additional information and/or arrange for your school to participate in the ABES, call the toll-free information line at 1-800-675-9727. If no one is available to answer your call, please leave a message and someone will call you back promptly.

Inquiries to CDC should be directed to Dr. Nancy Brener, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Mailstop US8-1, Atlanta, GA 30329-4027; email at nad1@cdc.gov or telephone at 404-718-8133.