



The Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) collects self-reported health information from Colorado middle and high school students. The survey is conducted every two years and covers a wide range of issues, including: physical activity and nutrition; suicide; bullying; mental health; alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs; sexual health (high school only) and school/family protective factors. A unified version of the survey was launched in 2013 that consolidates multiple needs for youth health data and allows for both state and regional-level results. The unified HKCS was administered in Fall 2013 to over 40,000 middle and high school students.

For the first time, the 2013 survey asked Colorado high school students to self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual.^{1,2} Overall, **5.7%** of high school students surveyed self-identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, while **94.3%** identified as heterosexual. This summary outlines findings highlighting significant health disparities faced by lesbian, gay or bisexual high school students compared to their heterosexual peers.³

Weight, Nutrition, and Physical Activity

- More than a quarter (**29.3%**) of lesbian, gay or bisexual high school students were overweight or obese⁴ compared to **17.6%** of heterosexual students.
- Compared to heterosexual students (**28.0%**), lesbian, gay or bisexual students (**14.5%**) were less likely to report getting at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity.

Tobacco Use and Marijuana Use

- Overall, **30.8%** of lesbian, gay or bisexual students reported current cigarette smoking as compared to **9.1%** of heterosexual students.
- Almost 1 of 3 youth identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (**31.2%**) reported having used e-cigarettes compared to **14.6%** of heterosexual students.
- Overall, **39.7%** of lesbian, gay or bisexual students reported marijuana use in the past 30 days, which is more than twice the rate among heterosexual students (**17.7%**).

Alcohol Use

- More than three quarters (**79.5%**) of lesbian, gay or bisexual youth had ever tried alcohol in their lifetime.
- Almost half (**48.3%**) of youth identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days compared to **29.7%** of heterosexual youth.
- Approximately **27.9%** of lesbian, gay or bisexual students reported binge drinking compared to **15.6%** of heterosexual students.

Other Drug Use

- One-third (**33.2%**) of youth who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual reported using a prescription drug (such as OxyContin, Ritalin, Xanax, etc.) without a prescription compared to **11.8%** among their heterosexual peers.

ADVERSE HEALTH IMPACT

Decades of research demonstrates that **health disparities** experienced by lesbian, gay or bisexual youth **are not a direct result of their sexual orientation.**

Rather, the challenges associated with growing up in a **social context that stigmatizes and discriminates** against lesbian, gay or bisexual youth has been found to **adversely impact** their **health** and health behaviors.⁵

- Lesbian, gay or bisexual students were more likely than heterosexual students to use cocaine (**15.4%** versus **4.1%**), heroin (**9.7%** versus **1.6%**), methamphetamines (**12.4%** versus **1.9%**), ecstasy (**19.4%** versus **5.1%**) and to sniff glue or other inhalants (**22.6%** versus **5.4%**).

Bullying, Personal Safety and Violence

- Students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (**41.4%**) were more than twice as likely as their heterosexual peers (**18.2%**) to have been bullied at school in the previous 12 months.
- More than a third (**36.5%**) of lesbian, gay or bisexual students had been electronically bullied in the past 12 months, compared to **13.3%** of heterosexual students.
- Almost half (**46.7%**) of youth identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual had been bullied because someone thought they were lesbian, gay or bisexual. Among heterosexual youth, **6.2%** had been bullied because someone thought they were lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual students were four times as likely as heterosexuals to have missed school because they felt unsafe (**14.8%** versus **3.7%**).

¹Students were also given the option of selecting "not sure" as their sexual orientation status. 16.3% of students are missing sexual orientation status or responded "not sure"; these students are excluded from sexual orientation analyses.

²This survey did not collect information about the experiences of transgender students.

³Select statistically significant differences are noted in this document. Lack of notation about differences does not imply that differences do not exist.

⁴Body mass index is calculated from self-reported height and weight (kg/m²). BMI values are compared with sex- and age-specific reference data and obese is defined as a BMI ≥95th percentile and overweight is ≥85th and <95th percentile for age and sex.

⁵The Institute of Medicine. (2011). *The Health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people: Building a foundation for better understanding*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.



APPLICATIONS OF HKCS DATA

These data are intended to create awareness about priority health behaviors of youth in Colorado, as well as to provide a tool to assess how behaviors change over time. Data can be used by key stakeholders, including legislators, educators, students, parents, community members and school staff to better understand behaviors, set program goals, develop programs, support health-related policies and seek funding.

In 2013, numerous schools and communities choose to participate in a local administration of the survey to be able to compare their results to state data and national data to better understand what priorities may exist in their community and to monitor health behavior trends. In 2013, over 200 schools participated in a state-administered HKCS, representing over 40,000 students.

An executive summary is available.

Mental Health

- A total of **59.4%** of lesbian, gay or bisexual youth were sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in the past year, compared to **20.8%** of their heterosexual peers.
- Nearly half (**48.5%**) of lesbian, gay or bisexual students had considered suicide in the past 12 months, a rate more than four times higher than that among heterosexual students (**11.7%**).
- Overall, **28.2%** of lesbian, gay or bisexual students had attempted suicide in the past 12 months compared to **4.5%** of heterosexual students.

Sexual Health

- More than half (**55.8%**) of lesbian, gay or bisexual students reported ever having had sex, with **40.0%** having had sex in the past 3 months. By comparison, **31.9%** of heterosexual students had had sex and **22.3%** had done so in the past 3 months.
- More than 1 of 4 (**27.4%**) of lesbian, gay or bisexual students reported being forced to have sex, which is more than five times the rate among heterosexual students (**4.9%**).

Youth Engagement and Connections in and out of School

- Students identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (**58.1%**) were less likely than their peers (**73.3%**) to find school work meaningful and were also less likely than heterosexual students to participate in extracurricular activities (**57.4%** and **70.9%**, respectively).
- An estimated **68.3%** of lesbian, gay or bisexual students had someone to talk to or go to for help (in or out of school) compared to **83.4%** of their heterosexual peers.

Protective Factors

Students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual face significant disparities in each health domain compared to their heterosexual peers. However, several protective factors appear to be associated with lower health risks among lesbian, gay or bisexual students.

- When these students had **someone to talk to or go to for help** they were significantly less likely to have attempted suicide or been electronically bullied in the past 12 months.
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual high school students who **felt safe at school** were significantly less likely to have attempted suicide in past 12 months, to be current cigarette smokers, or to have been bullied in school or electronically.
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual high school students who **participated in extra-curricular activities** were significantly less likely to have attempted suicide or to be current cigarette smokers.

These results point to the importance of bolstering protective factors in families, schools and communities as a way of increasing health equity for lesbian, gay or bisexual youth in Colorado, such as:

- Ensuring young people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual have a supportive, caring adult to talk to.
- Ensuring safe and supportive school environments that promote the full inclusion of lesbian, gay or bisexual students.
- Engaging lesbian, gay or bisexual youth in meaningful participation in their schools and communities.
- Directing resources, programs and policies to promote health equity among lesbian, gay or bisexual youth.

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