

Family and School Involvement Key to Teen Health

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Burnaby, BC -- Teens are healthier when they have strong connections with family and school, according to a new study of BC adolescents. The survey of nearly 26,000 students shows that youth are less likely to take risks when they feel that parents and teachers care about them and treat them fairly.

Students who report good relationships at home and school have better physical and emotional health and higher expectations for continuing their education. They also are less likely to use drugs or alcohol or to engage in other risky behaviours. Results of the Adolescent Health Survey II (AHS) were released today by The McCreary Centre Society in a report called Healthy Connections: Listening to BC Youth.

Healthy Connections reports highlights of the second province-wide teen health survey conducted by the Burnaby-based McCreary Centre Society. AHS II is the largest youth health survey ever done in BC. The 127-item questionnaire was administered last year to 25,838 students in Grades 7-12. Forty-three of BC's 59 school districts agreed to participate in the study. The McCreary Centre Society, a non-governmental, non-profit research organization, completed the first Adolescent Health Survey in 1992.

The report "should help to calm public fears following recent incidents of youth violence in Canada and the US," says McCreary Executive Director Roger Tonkin. Dr. Tonkin says the survey results confirm that "today's young people are not more violent, more alienated from their parents or less interested in their education. Most are coping well with the challenges of a complicated world."

The survey included questions on a range of topics including physical health, emotional distress, sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, smoking, exercise, and nutrition. Key findings in the report include:

- Nine out of 10 BC teens report good or excellent physical health.
- Teens are waiting longer to begin having sex; 77% of students in the 1998 survey say they have never had sex, compared with 70% in 1992.
- Fewer girls are experiencing sexual or physical abuse; 15% of girls in 1998 report a history of sexual abuse, down from 21% in the previous survey.
- More youth are using bike helmets; 30% of students always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, up from 6% in 1992.

However, the report does indicate room for improvement in preventing health problems. Survey results suggest that many students aren't getting the message about smoking, which has not decreased in this age group since the last survey. About 10% are regular daily smokers. While more teens are delaying the start of sexual activity,

many sexually-active young people don't use condoms or birth control. Over 40% of sexually-active youth say they did not use a condom the last time they had sex.

Nearly half of male students say they received an injury in the past year serious enough to require medical attention. Most injuries involved sports or recreational activities. Only 55% of students always use a seatbelt, and over a third of teen drivers say they've driven a car after using drugs or alcohol. The survey results also show a sharp increase in marijuana use. Forty percent of students report using marijuana at least once, up from 25% in 1992.

Dr. Tonkin says he hopes the report will increase awareness about the importance of adolescence "as a key period of transition with consequences for the rest of life." Information from the survey will be distributed to government and community agencies for use in developing programs and services to promote youth health.

Funding for the study was provided by the British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families; Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors; Ministry of Women's Equality; Population Health Fund, Health Canada; and Vancouver Foundation.

Copies of Healthy Connections are available from The McCreary Centre Society. Further information about the survey is available on the McCreary Web site (www.mcs.bc.ca).

For more information:
Dr. Roger Tonkin
The McCreary Centre Society
tel (604)291-1996
fax (604)291-7308