

McCREARY
CENTRE
SOCIETY



THE BIG PICTURE:

AN OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 BC ADOLESCENT
HEALTH SURVEY PROVINCIAL RESULTS

We gratefully acknowledge that the McCreary Centre Society is located on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xwməθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl'ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We also acknowledge the ancestral and continuing connection to this land of the Métis Nation.

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An overview of the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey provincial results

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The cover image is a montage of photographs taken from across BC, submitted by young people as a part of a photovoice project conducted for the launch of the 2023 BC AHS results. The images taken by youth are included throughout this report.

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Acknowledgements

The release of this seventh report of the provincial results of the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) marks 30 years of the BC AHS. This would be a significant achievement in itself, but is especially remarkable considering the global pandemic, acute staffing shortages in public health, and survey fatigue among school personnel and students. This report stands as an incredible testament to the resilience and perseverance of so many British Columbians who want to ensure they have up-to-date, accurate, and comprehensive data about the health of our young people, with which to make informed and evidence-based decisions.

We particularly want to thank the BC Government for their funding support, as well as the regional health authorities, participating school districts, and nursing schools who supported the development and implementation of the survey. We also want to thank the Grade 7 to 12 students who completed the survey, and who shared so much about themselves. Finally, we would like to thank Dr. Rita Green for her statistical expertise and support.

Listed on **pages 70–72** are the nurses and allied health professionals who administered the survey. They also ensured youth felt comfortable answering the survey honestly, answered any questions participants had, and provided health information and resources to those who needed them. Our gratitude goes out to each and every one of them.

Quotes from survey participants are included throughout the report.

"I enjoyed taking this [survey] and I felt as though all the questions on it weren't too personal, but just enough to still be okay with answering them. I felt welcomed to share what I do through this survey, and would be glad to take it again."

Grade 7 student

"This survey was long!"

Grade 9 student

"Thanks for the survey and the chance to miss physics class!"

Grade 11 student

"I think it is a really complete survey, covering all the aspects of health."

Grade 12 student

38,488

completed surveys

2,316

classrooms

553

schools

59

school districts

Table of contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	2
PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN BC	3
Gender identity	3
Sexual orientation	3
Ethnic background	4
Indigenous students	4
Racial identity	5
Religious affiliation	5
Time in Canada	6
Regional variations	6
HOME LIFE	7
Caretaking responsibilities	8
Government care experience	8
Parental monitoring	9
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING	10
Employment	10
Unstable housing	11
Material deprivation	11
Food security	12
PHYSICAL HEALTH	13
Health ratings	13
Sleep	13
Health conditions and disabilities	14
Injuries	15
Access to health care	15
Exercise	17

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	19
Quality of life	19
Self-confidence and sense of competence	20
Hopefulness	20
Loneliness	20
Stress and despair	21
Self-harm and suicidality	22
Specific conditions	23
Access to mental health services	24
Accessing reliable mental health information	26
Gender differences in mental health	27
EATING BEHAVIOURS AND BODY IMAGE	30
Food consumption	30
Disordered eating and body image	32
Gender differences in eating behaviours and body image	33
SEXUAL HEALTH	34
Oral sex	34
Sexual intercourse	34
Forced sex	35
Protection against sexually transmitted infections	35
Pregnancy involvement	36
Sex education at school	36
Accessing reliable sexual health information	37
Gender differences in sexual health	38
SUBSTANCE USE	39
Vaping	39
Smoking	40
Alcohol	41
Cannabis	43
Other substances	44
Reported reasons for using substances	45
Consequences of substance use	45
Gender differences in substance use	46

ADVERSE EXPERIENCES	47
Abuse	47
Sexual harassment	48
Dating violence	48
Discrimination	49
Other forms of victimization	50
Bereavement	50
Gender differences in adverse experiences	51
SCHOOL EXPERIENCES	52
School connectedness and sense of safety	52
School absences	54
Educational plans	55
Gender differences in school experiences	55
RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS	56
Friendships	56
Online dating relationships	56
Caring and supportive adults	57
Family connectedness	58
Community connectedness and sense of safety	58
Other types of connectedness	59
Gender differences in relationships and connections	61
RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES	62
Swimming ability	62
Extracurricular physical activity	62
Barriers to engaging in extracurricular physical activity	64
Gender differences in physical activity	65
Cultural and volunteer activities	65
Connection to activities	66
Gambling	67
Phone use	68
NEXT STEPS AND RESOURCES	69
2023 BC AHS REGIONAL COORDINATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS	70

Executive summary

The BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) has been conducted every 5 years for 30 years. Results from the 2023 BC AHS show that the profile of BC youth aged 12–19 continues to diversify, with a greater percentage of youth born abroad and identifying as a gender and sexual minority, and fewer being of European heritage than in previous survey years.

There were also some changes over time in youth's living situations. For example, over the past decade, the percentage who lived in a household that included their grandparent(s) increased. There was also an increase in the percentage who had caretaking responsibilities for a relative (e.g., a relative with a disability or younger sibling) and a pet.

In comparison to past survey years, youth were more likely to have self-harmed in the past year, engaged in disordered eating behaviours, experienced sexual abuse, and been bereaved due to overdose and violence. They were also less likely to rate their overall health and mental health positively, feel they could manage the stress in their life, eat healthily, sleep for at least 8 hours, be satisfied with their quality of life, plan to attend post-secondary, and feel hopeful for their future.

There were also some positive changes over the past 5 years. For example, there was an increase in Indigenous youth who could speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language.

Compared to previous survey years, youth were less likely to have engaged in sexual activity and to have vaped, smoked tobacco, drunk alcohol, and used cannabis. However, those who had tried tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis were more likely than 5 years earlier to have done so before their 13th birthday.

Survey results showed differences between youth at different ages and grade levels. While many health risk and health-promoting behaviours increased or decreased with age, some peaked in the middle grades. For example, youth in the middle grades were the least likely to feel safe at school and that their teachers cared about them. Also, the percentage who attempted suicide in the past year increased between Grade 7 and Grade 9 before decreasing again in higher grades.

Some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic appear to be reflected in the survey results. For example, compared to 5 years earlier, youth were less likely to feel connected to their school and community, and to have in-person friends; and were more likely to have online friends whom they had never met in person. However, the 25-year trend in declining participation in informal sports (without a coach) was halted, and there was a slight increase in regular participation in these types of sports from 5 years earlier. Participation in extreme sports also increased after declining in 2018.

Overall, males were the most likely to report positive health and well-being, and non-binary youth were the least likely. For example, the majority of males rated their mental health as good or excellent, compared to half of females, and around 1 in 5 non-binary youth. Also, non-binary youth were around 4 times as likely as males to have deliberately self-harmed in the past year, and over 4 times as likely to have seriously considered suicide and attempted suicide in that time period.

The survey results highlight factors which negatively affect health and well-being, such as living in poverty and experiencing deprivation and hunger. However, they also clearly show the value of youth feeling connected to family, culture, school, and community.

Introduction

This is the first report to be published from the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). It provides a broad overview of the health of youth in Grades 7–12 across the province. More detailed reports will follow for many of the topic areas in this report, as will reports of more localized regional data.

The 2023 BC AHS was completed by around 38,500 young people aged 12–19 in 59 of BC's 60 school districts. The survey was developed in consultation with young people, parents, and other experts in youth health. It was pilot-tested with diverse young people in communities across BC before being administered by Public Health Nurses and allied health professionals to students in mainstream public schools in the spring of 2023.

The BC AHS was first administered in 1992. Some of the questions on the 2023 survey have been asked since the first survey, and others have been added to reflect new and emerging health issues. This report includes some trend data which shows the changing picture of youth health over the past 30 years, as well as since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The BC AHS is unique in that it can provide data for a representative sample of students at every grade level from Grades 7 to 12. This report therefore offers comparisons of results for youth at different grade levels to illustrate how health behaviours and experiences can change at different stages of an adolescent's development.

One aspect of youth health that has garnered more attention in recent years is gender. The report therefore includes a selection of gender comparisons. These sometimes appear in the different subsections within a chapter, and are sometimes provided at the conclusion of a chapter. The terms male, female, and non-binary are used to describe the three gender identity categories used in the analysis. These terms reflect the preference of BC youth who participated in discussions about terminology, and who particularly disliked being referred to as boys and girls.

Limitations

The 2023 BC AHS is considered representative of 97.6% of BC youth in Grades 7–12 (aged 12–19) who were attending mainstream schools in the province. However, it may not be representative of all youth in this age range. For example, the BC AHS does not include students who were absent on the day the survey was administered, had a health or learning challenge which prevented them from completing the survey, were attending independent schools, or were home-schooled.

Using this report

All 2023 comparisons and associations in this report are statistically significant at $p < .01$. This means there is up to a 1% likelihood that these results occurred by chance. Comparisons to previous survey years (trends over time) were considered statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Where it is not obvious, differences in tables or charts that are not statistically significant are noted.

The terms 'youth' and 'student' are used interchangeably to refer to 2023 BC AHS participants.

A fact sheet detailing the methodology of the 2023 BC AHS is available at mcs.bc.ca.

Profile of young people in BC

Grade 7–12 students who participated in the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey reflected diversity in terms of their ethnic, racial, religious, and gender identity, and their sexual orientation

Gender identity

“I am female (non-binary)—Some people aren’t a girl or a boy.”

Grade 11 student

In 2023, around half of youth identified as male, 45% as female, and 5% as non-binary (i.e., they did not identify as male or female, or were not yet sure of their gender identity). The percentage who identified as non-binary increased from 2% in 2018.

For 94% of youth, their gender identity matched their sex assigned at birth (vs. 98% in 2018), and 1% indicated they were transgender (vs. <1% in 2018).

Sexual orientation

Sexual minority is the term used to describe young people who did not identify as straight, and includes those who identified as mostly straight, bisexual, pansexual, gay, lesbian, asexual, were unsure of their sexual orientation, or reported a sexual orientation that was not among the list of options.

“My parents don’t know I am bisexual.”

Grade 7 student

Three quarters of youth identified as straight, which was lower than in previous years (e.g., 82% in 2018).

As might be anticipated, youth in higher grades were less likely to be unsure of their sexual orientation (e.g., 3% of Grade 12s were unsure vs. 5% of Grade 9s). They were also more likely to identify as a sexual minority (e.g., 13% of Grade 12s were bisexual or pansexual vs. 9% of Grade 9s).

Sexual orientation				
	Overall	Males	Females	Non-binary youth
Straight	75%	88%	68%	6%
Mostly straight	6%	3%	9%	3%
Bisexual or pansexual	10%	4%	13%	45%
Gay or lesbian	2%	2%	2%	14%
Asexual	2%	1%	1%	12%
Not sure	5%	3%	6%	15%
Something other than those listed above	<1%	<1%	<1%	4%

Note: Percentages in each column do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note: Females were more likely than males to identify as gay or lesbian and asexual.

An in-depth look at the health and well-being of gender and sexual minority youth who completed the 2023 BC AHS will be published in partnership with the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC).

Ethnic background

“I wish there were more Asians who look like me at school so I could connect with more people.”

Grade 9 student

Reflecting the provincial picture since the first BC AHS in 1992, the most common heritage youth identified with was European.

Family background	
European	43%
East Asian	17%
South Asian	13%
Indigenous	10%
Southeast Asian	8%
Latin American, South American, Central American	5%
Middle Eastern	4%
African	3%
Australian, Pacific Islander	2%
Caribbean	1%
Other	4%
Don't know	12%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Over the past 30 years, the percentage of youth who identified as European has steadily declined while there has been an increase in youth from other backgrounds. For example, between 2003 and 2023, the percentage of youth of European heritage dropped from 61% to 43%, while there was an increase in those who identified as South Asian (from 5% in 2003 to 13%), Southeast Asian (4% to 8%), and African (2% to 3%).

Indigenous students

“I don't know which Indigenous community we belong to (Great-grandmother forgot because she went to residential schools).”

Grade 11 student

One in 10 youth identified as Indigenous which was consistent with results over the past 15 years, and an increase from 7% in 2003.

Among Indigenous youth:

- 61% identified as First Nations, 37% as Métis, 2% as Inuit, and 6% as another Indigenous background (e.g., Native American).
- 11% had previously lived on reserve, and 15% were currently living on reserve.
- 32% could speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language (vs. 28% in 2018). This included 2% who could have a conversation or were fluent.
- 6% identified as Two-Spirit.

Indigenous youth were asked about their family history of residential school. About half (51%) reported that a family member had been in residential school, including at least one of their parents (4%), grandparents (32%), and other relatives (30%). This is likely an under-representation as a third (33%) of Indigenous youth did not know their family history of residential school.

An in-depth look at the health and well-being of Indigenous youth who completed the survey will be published by McCreary's Young Indigenous Research Team (YIRT).

Racial identity

“I feel like a white city person because my parents don’t share about our ancestors.”

Grade 11 student

For the first time, the BC AHS asked youth to describe their racial identity. The majority identified as White, and just under a third as Asian.

Racial identity	
White	57%
Asian	31%
Indigenous	6%
Mixed background	6%
Latin American/Hispanic	4%
Black	3%
Other	5%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.
Note: Some youth of mixed heritage selected more than one racial identity, while others selected the option ‘mixed background’.

Religious affiliation

“I am agnostic and I sometimes feel pressured to be dutifully Christian.”

Grade 9 student

The 2023 BC AHS asked youth to identify their religious affiliation. Almost half (48%) indicated they did not identify with a religion, and 8% did not know their religion.

Religious affiliation	
Christian	24%
Sikh	8%
Muslim	4%
Buddhist	3%
Hindu	2%
Traditional (Indigenous) spirituality	2%
Jewish	1%
Other	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.



Time in Canada

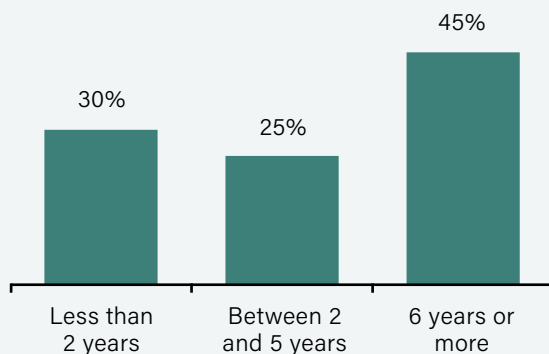
“We came here to Canada in October and started a new life.”

Grade 9 student

In the 2023 survey, 77% of youth were born in Canada. This is the lowest percentage in the history of the BC AHS (e.g., 84% in 1992 and 79% in 2018). Over the past decade, there has been an increase in those who arrived in Canada as international students (from 4% in 2013 to 8%) and as refugees (1% to 2%).

Among youth born abroad, nearly 1 in 3 had been in Canada for less than 2 years (vs. 18% in 1992).

How long students had lived in Canada
(among those born abroad)



In 2024, SARAVYC researchers will begin analysis of the BC AHS data looking at the health and well-being of migrant youth and international students.

Regional variations

There were some regional differences in the demographic profile of youth. For example:

- The Northern region had the highest percentage of youth who identified as Indigenous (31%) and who were born in Canada (92%).
- Vancouver Coastal had the highest percentage of youth who identified as East Asian (35%) and Southeast Asian (12%).
- Vancouver Island, Vancouver Coastal, and Fraser regions had a higher percentage of international students (all 9%) than the Interior (4%) and Northern (2%) regions.
- Fraser had the lowest percentage of youth born in Canada (73%).

Regional reports on the health and well-being of youth in each of the province's 16 Health Service Delivery Areas will be released in 2024.

Home life

"I've been living with my aunt for 10 months."

Grade 8 student

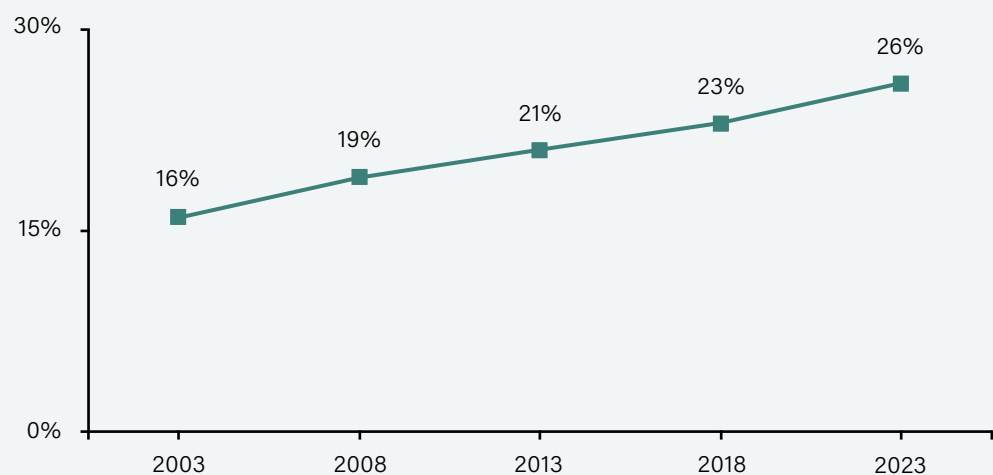
Youth most commonly lived with their mother/step-mother, father/stepfather, and siblings. There was an increase in those who lived in a household with their grandparents (from 9% in 2013 to 14%).

Over half of youth (54%) spoke a language other than English at home at least some of the time, including 26% who did so most or all of the time. These percentages have increased over time.

Who youth lived with most of the time	
Mother/stepmother	89%
Father/stepfather	79%
Two mothers or two fathers	1%
Sibling(s)/stepsibling(s)	68%
Grandparent(s)	14%
Foster parent(s)	1%
Their own child or children	<1%
Other children or youth	2%
Other adults related to them	5%
Other adults not related to them	2%
Lived alone	<1%
Lived with both parents at different times	8%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Increases over the past 20 years in youth who spoke a language other than English at home most or all the time



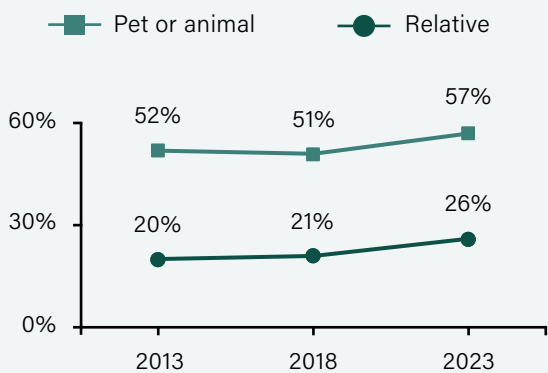
Caretaking responsibilities

"I have a sister in kindergarten and take care of her and my other siblings. It is a lot."

Grade 8 student

On an average school day, 26% of youth took care of a relative (e.g., a relative with a disability or their younger siblings), and 57% took care of a pet or other animal. Females were more likely than males to look after a relative (29% vs. 23%). Youth in 2023 were more likely to have caretaking responsibilities than in previous years.

10-year trend in students' caretaking responsibilities on an average school day



Note: The difference between 2013 and 2018 for taking care of a pet or animal was not statistically significant.

Government care experience

"I got turned away from a Youth Agreement."

Grade 12 student

Youth had experienced various types of government care (including through a delegated agency), as well as alternatives to government care, such as a Youth Agreement.

Types of care youth had experienced

	In the past year	Ever
Extended Family Program or Out of Care Order	1%	3%
Foster home	1%	2%
Group home	1%	2%
Youth Agreement	1%	1%
Custody centre/ detention centre	1%	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

McCreary's Youth Research Academy (YRA) will be releasing a report considering the health and well-being of youth with care experience.

Parental monitoring

“What do healthy parent-children relationships look like? How much control are children entitled to over their own life?”

Grade 10 student

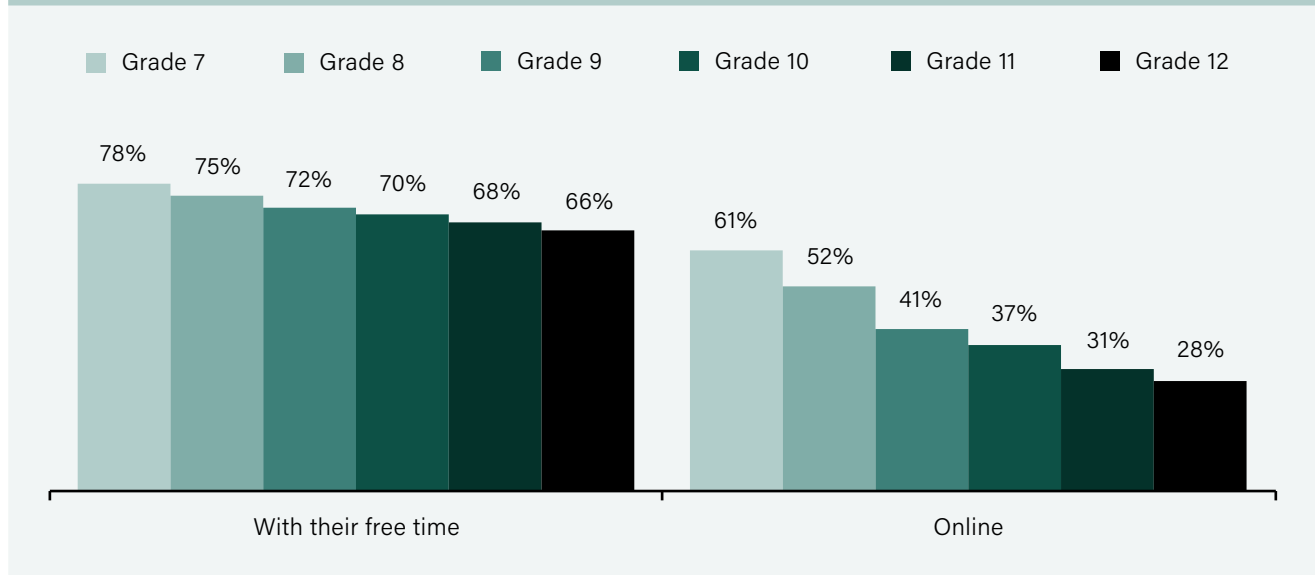
Youth were more likely to report that their parents/guardians monitored what they were doing in their free time than their time online. However, they were less likely than youth 5 years earlier to feel their parents were monitoring their free time (71% vs. 73% in 2018) and their time online (41% vs. 43%) most or all the time.

In the past 30 days, how often youth felt their parents knew what they were doing ...

	Never/ rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time/always
With their free time	12%	16%	71%
Online	38%	21%	41%

Note: Percentages in each row may not total 100% due to rounding.

Students in higher grades were less likely to have parents monitor what they were doing most/all of the time in the past 30 days



Note: For monitoring free time, the differences between Grade 9 and 10, and between Grade 11 and 12 were not statistically significant.

Economic well-being

Economic well-being is a key component of young people's overall well-being. It can include access to employment opportunities, stable housing, nutritious meals, and material items.

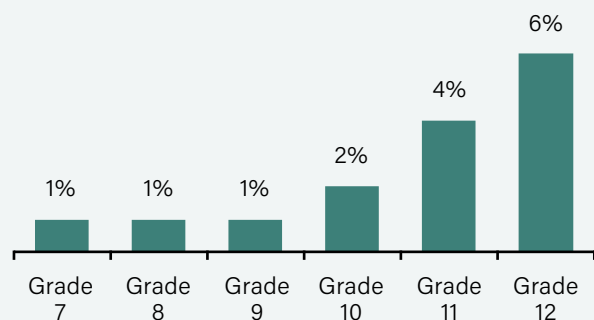
Employment

During the school year, 32% of youth worked at a paid job, with those in higher grades most likely to work (e.g., 57% in Grade 12 vs. 33% in Grade 10 vs. 15% in Grade 8).

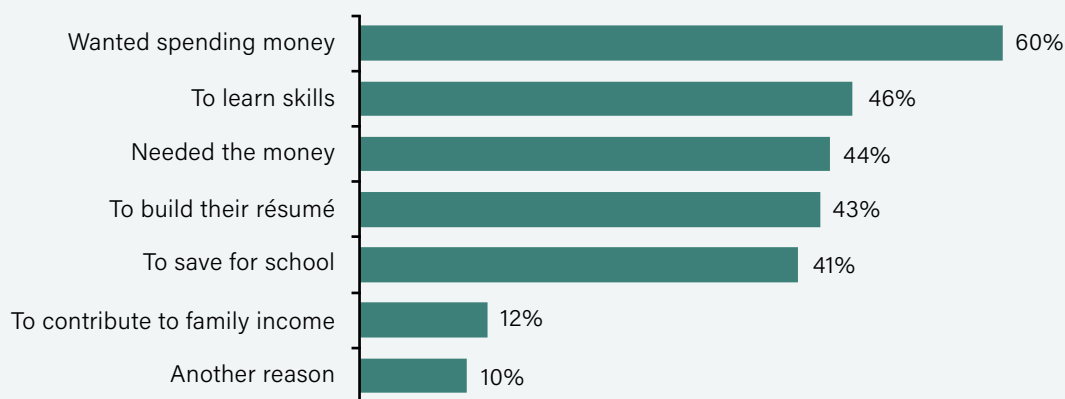
Youth most commonly worked 5 to 12 hours a week (13%), while 9% worked less than 5 hours, 7% worked 13 to 20 hours, and 2% worked 21 or more hours each week. Females were the least likely to work more than 20 hours a week (e.g., 2% vs. 3% of males).

When asked about their main reasons for working, most youth reported they wanted spending money. However, more than 1 in 10 worked to contribute to their family's income.

Students who worked at a paid job
21 hours or more each week



Students' reasons for working (among those who worked)



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Unstable housing

“I don’t feel safe at home.”

Grade 10 student

In the past 12 months, 5% of youth had run away from home. This was the lowest rate in 20 years, and dropped from 9% in 2013.

Also, during the past 12 months:

- 4% had been kicked out (a decrease from 6% in 2018).
- 17% moved from one place to another (e.g., house, apartment; vs. 25% in 2018); and 2% moved three or more times.
- 2% had been homeless (including couch surfing, staying on the street, staying in a shelter, etc.).

Non-binary youth were the most likely to have run away, been kicked out, moved multiple times, and been homeless. For example, 8% had been homeless in the past year, compared to 2% of males and females.

Most youth felt safe in their home. However, 3% rarely or never did. Males were the most likely to feel safe at home (95% vs. 92% of females vs. 78% of non-binary youth).

Searching for a place: The health and well-being of homeless and unstably housed youth in BC is available at mcs.bc.ca/hys, and includes some data from the 2023 BC AHS.

Material deprivation

“We are a family with five kids and my parents are really struggling. We need help.”

Grade 9 student

In 2018, McCreary developed a 10-item Youth Deprivation Index with the help of youth across the province. An 11th item (personal hygiene products) was added to the Index in 2023 following further consultations with youth.

Youth generally had each of the items in the Index. However, as in 2018, around a quarter (24% in 2023) lacked but wished they had at least one item, including 4% who were deprived of three or more items.

Rates of material deprivation were similar between 2018 and 2023 with and without the addition of the 11th item.

Youth who lacked but wished they had ...	
Money to spend on themselves	11%
Space of their own to hang out in	6%
Lunch for school/money to buy lunch	5%
Clothes to fit in	4%
Money for school supplies, school trips, and extracurricular activities	4%
Smartphone	4%
Equipment/clothes for extracurricular activities	3%
Access to transportation	3%
A quiet place to sleep	3%
Access to the Internet	1%
Personal hygiene products (e.g., soap, deodorant)	1%

Food security

"I live on my own so there is never food in the house."

Grade 11 student

In the past 12 months, 6% of youth had cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.

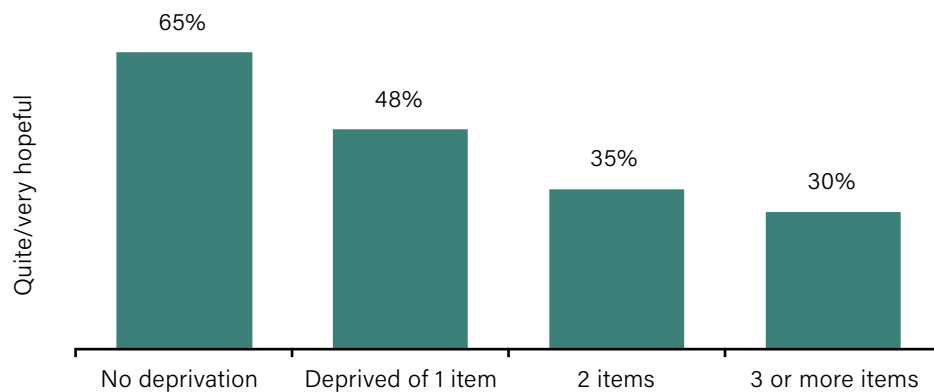
Also, 9% went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food. This included 1% who went to bed hungry often or always. The percentage who went to bed hungry at least sometimes was lower than 5 years earlier (10% in 2018), but remained above the rate a decade earlier (7% in 2013).

The day before completing the survey, 3% of youth had eaten food from a food bank.

Why is economic well-being important?

Youth who experience poorer economic well-being are less likely than their peers to report positive health. For example, the more items from the Youth Deprivation Index that youth were deprived of, the less likely they were to report good or excellent mental health, satisfaction with their life, and hopefulness.

The more items students were deprived of, the less likely they were to feel hopeful for their future



Similarly, youth who went to bed hungry at least sometimes were less likely than those who never went to bed hungry to report good or excellent overall health (45% vs. 76%). They were also more likely to experience extreme stress in the past month (29% vs. 11%), and to use substances such as opioids (4% had used heroin, fentanyl, or other opioids vs. 1% who never went to bed hungry).

Physical health

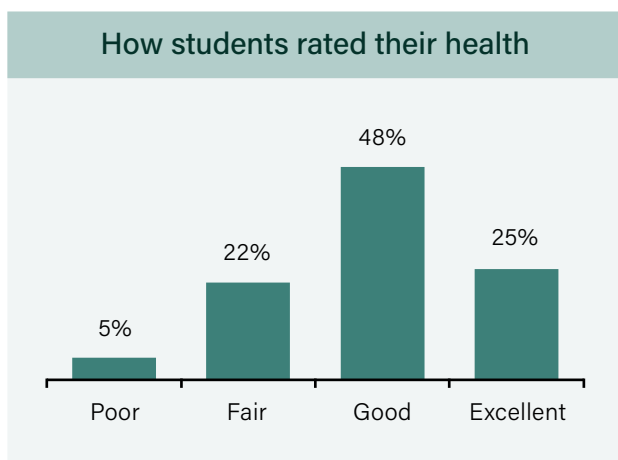
During adolescence, young people begin to make their own decisions around their health, including sleep, nutrition, and physical activity. It is a time when they can learn to make healthy choices that can influence their behaviours into adulthood. It is also a time when they may take risks to their physical health, which can result in accidents and injuries.

Health ratings

"I would like to learn more about physical health (working out, eating properly, etc.)."

Grade 12 student

Most youth rated their health as good or excellent. However, positive ratings decreased over the past decade from 87% in 2013, to 81% in 2018, to 73% in 2023.



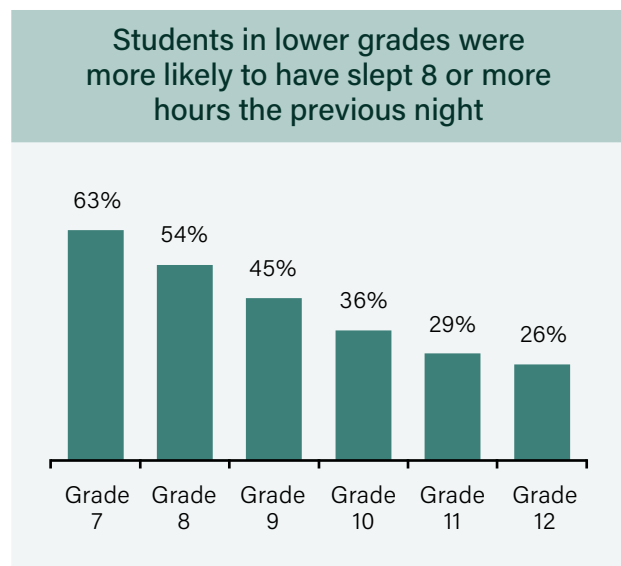
Reflecting results from previous survey years, males were the most likely to rate their health as good or excellent (80% vs. 68% of females vs. 43% of non-binary youth), as were youth in Grades 7 and 8 compared to those in higher grades (e.g., 78% in Grade 7 vs. 70% in Grade 12).

Sleep

"I really get affected if I don't get enough sleep."

Grade 12 student

The night before completing the survey, 42% of youth had slept for at least 8 hours, while 18% had slept 5 hours or less. Youth were less likely to sleep for 8 or more hours than in previous years (e.g., 53% in 2013, and 48% in 2018).



While most youth were able to sleep undisturbed the previous night, 26% reported that their sleep was interrupted.

After the time they were expected to be asleep, most youth engaged in at least one activity. Males were the most likely to be gaming and playing or watching esports. Females were the most likely to be scrolling through social media, chatting or texting, and doing their homework (e.g., 59% were doing homework vs. 49% of non-binary youth vs. 43% of males). One in 10 youth (10%) went offline (e.g., turned their phone off, put it on silent) and did not engage in any activities after they were supposed to be asleep.

Activities youth engaged in after they were expected to be asleep	
Scrolling through social media	67%
Chatting or texting	60%
Doing homework	51%
Gaming (other than esports)	30%
Playing/watching esports	20%
Doing other things online (e.g., watching videos)	66%

Health conditions and disabilities

"I was born with a heart condition."

Grade 9 student

Youth experienced a range of physical and cognitive conditions and disabilities. (Mental health conditions are discussed in the ***Mental health and well-being section.***) The percentage who reported having a long-term/chronic medical condition continued to decrease (from 10% in 2013, to 8% in 2018, to 7%), while the percentage who reported having a learning disability doubled (from 4% in 2013 and 2018, to 8%).

Health conditions and disabilities	
Learning disability (e.g., dyslexia)	8%
Long-term/chronic medical condition	7%
Deaf or hard of hearing	2%
Blind or visual impairment which cannot be corrected with glasses/contact lenses	2%
Physical disability (e.g., cerebral palsy, use a wheelchair)	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among those with a health condition or disability, 19% did not have the resources they needed to overcome the barriers they faced.

Injuries

“I had to go to the ER because of 2 broken legs from a skiing incident.”

Grade 7 student

In the past 12 months, 33% of youth had been injured seriously enough to need medical attention (vs. 26% in 2018). Males were the most likely to have been seriously injured (e.g., 35% vs. 30% of females).

Fifteen percent of youth had experienced a concussion in the past 12 months. This was higher than the percentage 5 years earlier (13% in 2018), but slightly lower than 10 years earlier (16% in 2013).

How youth got their most serious concussion in the past 12 months (among those who had been concussed)	
Playing/training for organized sports	40%
Playing recreational sports (without a coach)	15%
Using alcohol or other substances	12%
Riding a bike	11%
Fighting with another person	8%
Riding/driving in a motor vehicle	7%
Working	5%
Skateboarding	5%
Other	22%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Females were the least likely to have experienced a serious concussion in the past 12 months (e.g., 14% vs. 16% of males). There were also some gender differences in how youth got their concussion. For example, males were more likely than females to have been concussed while fighting or participating in physical activity such as biking (14% vs. 5%; among those who had a concussion). Females were more likely to have got their concussion while using substances (e.g., 16% vs. 9% of males).

Among those who experienced a concussion in the past 12 months, fewer than half (42%) had received medical treatment for their head injury.

Access to health care

“We don’t have a family doctor and we really need one because I have 6 members in my family.”

Grade 9 student

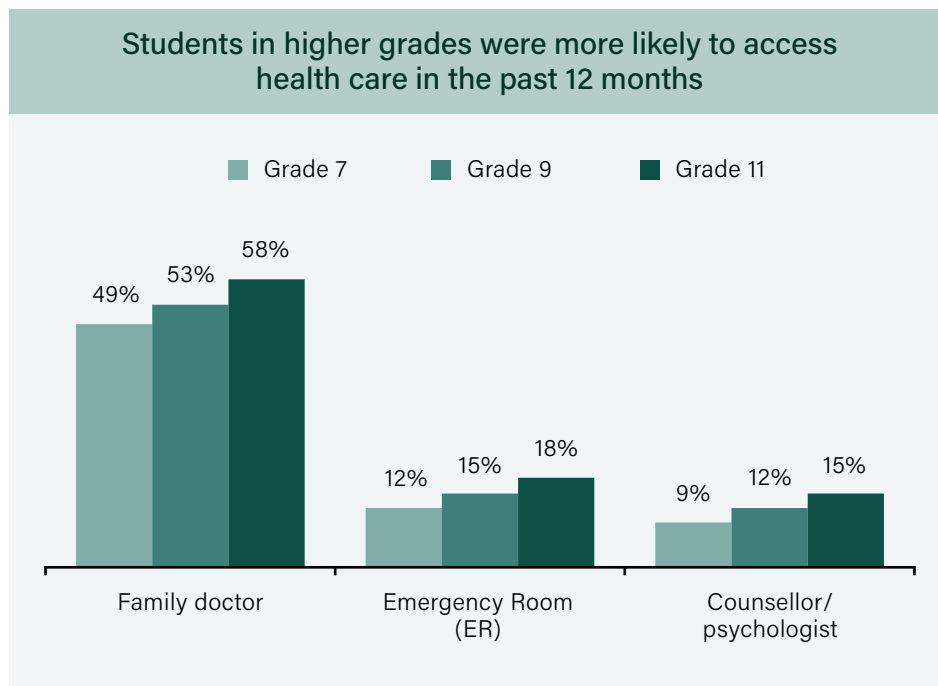
In the past 12 months, 23% of youth had not needed to access health care. However, 3% reported they had not been able to get the care they needed (a decrease from 4% in 2018). Non-binary youth were the most likely to report not getting the care they needed (8% vs. 3% of females vs. 2% of males).

Youth who accessed health care in the past 12 months most commonly did so through a family doctor. However, they were less likely to have seen a family doctor than youth in 2018 (54% vs. 61%), and were also less likely to have accessed a walk-in clinic (24% vs. 35%) and youth clinic (2% vs. 4%). They were slightly more likely to have accessed a counsellor/psychologist (12% vs. 11%).

Where youth got health care in the past 12 months	
Family doctor	54%
Specialist (e.g., dermatologist, psychiatrist)	30%
Walk-in clinic	24%
Emergency Room (ER)	15%
Counsellor/psychologist	12%
Nurse	9%
Youth clinic	2%
School wellness centre	2%
Foundry centre/Foundry Virtual BC	2%
Traditional healer	1%
Other	3%

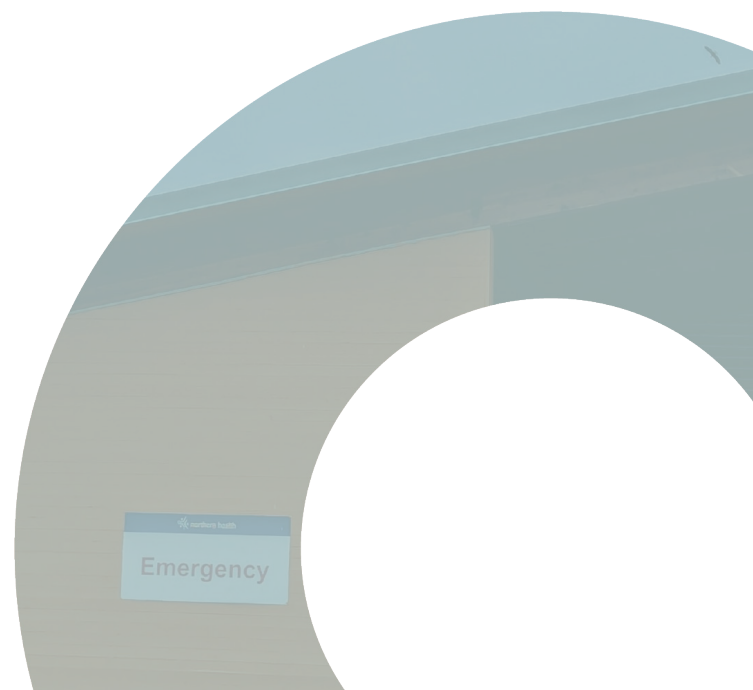
Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Students in higher grades were the most likely to have accessed health care in the past year (e.g., 74% of those in Grade 7 vs. 78% in Grade 9 vs. 80% in Grade 11).



Around 4 in 10 youth (39%) needed medical treatment in the past 12 months because they were physically sick or hurt, and most (82%) got the care they needed.

Most youth (83%) visited a dentist within the past 12 months, while 10% last went to the dentist 12–24 months ago, and 6% had last been more than 2 years ago. Around 2% of youth had never been to the dentist.



Exercise

The 2023 BC AHS asked about exercise engagement, as well as about youth's feelings toward exercising. (Engagement in sports and other extracurricular physical activity is discussed in the [Recreational activities section](#).)

"Does dog walking count as exercise?"

Grade 8 student

Canadian guidelines for physical activity recommend that youth aged 12–17 do an hour of moderate to vigorous activity every day (csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/children-youth/). Those aged 18 and older should get at least 2.5 hours of this type of exercise per week (csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-18-64/).

Most youth (88%) got at least an hour of moderate to vigorous exercise in the past week.

Number of days in the past week youth got at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise	
0 days	12%
1 day	7%
2 days	10%
3 days	14%
4 days	13%
5 days	16%
6 days	9%
All 7 days	19%

Among youth aged 12–17, 19% engaged in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise every day in the past week. Youth in lower grades were generally more likely than those in higher grades to have met the guidelines. For example, 23% of students in Grade 7 exercised daily, compared to 20% in Grade 10 (and 13% in Grade 12).

Among youth aged 18 and older, 59% participated in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise on at least 3 days in the past week.

The majority of youth reported that they enjoyed exercising and being physically active at least somewhat (88%), including 35% who enjoyed exercising very much, with no differences by grade.

Gender differences in exercising

Males were the most likely to enjoy exercising very much (45% vs. 26% of females vs. 13% of non-binary youth). They were also the most likely to meet the physical activity guidelines for their age group, which was consistent with previous years' survey results. For example, 68% of males aged 18 or older exercised on 3 or more days in the past week, compared to 52% of females.

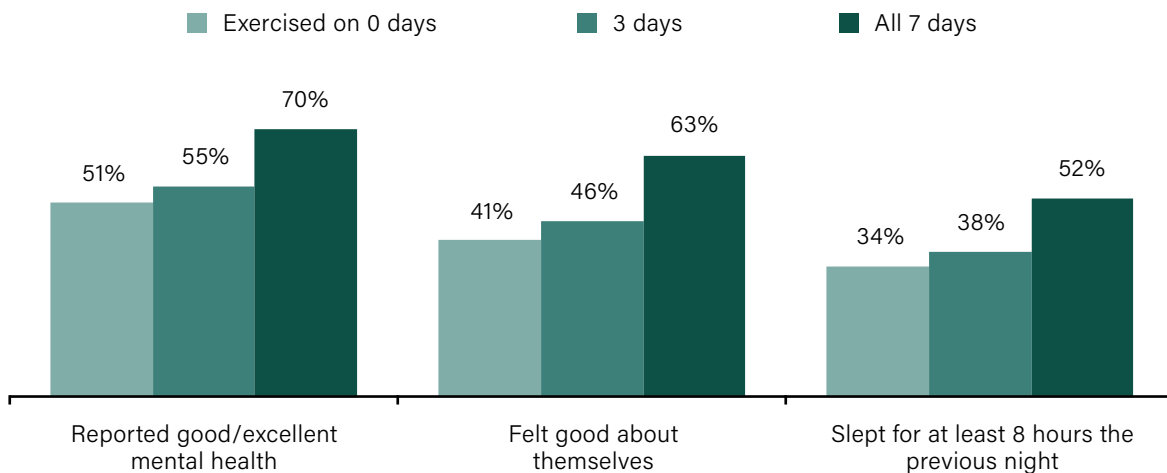
Males aged 12–17 were more likely than those 5 years earlier to exercise daily (26% vs. 24% in 2018), while non-binary youth were less likely to exercise this frequently (10% vs. 13% in 2018). The percentage for females was comparable to 5 years earlier (13% in 2023).

Why is physical health important?

There is a strong link between physical and mental health. For example, youth who rated their health as good or excellent were more likely than those who rated it as fair or poor to feel good about themselves (64% vs. 18%), and to feel they had a good life (86% vs. 47%).

Youth who engaged in health-promoting behaviours were more likely to experience positive mental health and life satisfaction. For example, youth who slept for at least 8 hours were more likely to report good or excellent mental health (76% vs. 48% who slept fewer hours). Also, the more regularly youth exercised, the more likely they were to report positive health and well-being.

The more days on which students exercised in the past week, the more likely they were to report positive health and well-being



Positive outcomes were also seen when youth were able to access needed health care. For example, youth who got the medical help they needed were more likely to report good or excellent mental health (58% vs. 21% who did not get needed medical care), to feel their life was going well (67% vs. 29%), and to feel hopeful for their future (63% vs. 32%).

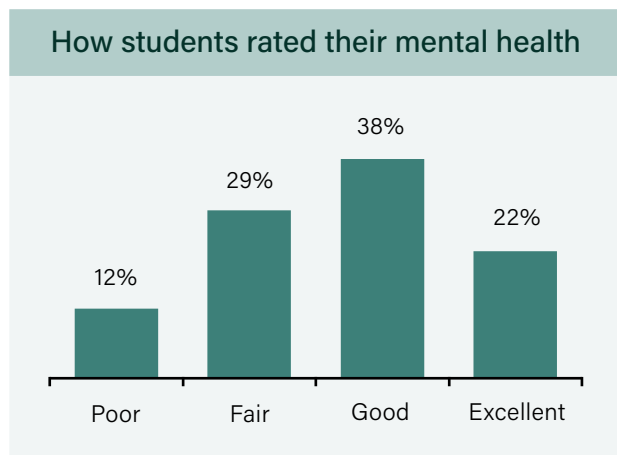
Mental health and well-being

Mental health is a key component of healthy youth development, and can include psychological, social, and emotional well-being.

"I think my life and mental health is pretty good."

Grade 7 student

The majority of youth rated their mental health as good or excellent. However, there was a decrease in positive mental health ratings over the past decade (from 81% in 2013, to 73% in 2018, to 60% in 2023).



Note: Percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Youth in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to rate their mental health as good or excellent (e.g., 72% in Grade 7 vs. 60% in Grade 9 vs. 54% in Grade 11).

Quality of life

"I am constantly bombarded with bad news, it makes living not so fun, but my friends and family's lives are worse so I don't want to complain."

Grade 10 student

Youth generally indicated having a good life and that their life was going well, and a minority wished they had a different life. However, they were less likely to rate their quality of life positively compared to youth 5 years earlier.

How much youth agreed/strongly agreed ...		
	2018	2023
They had a good life	79%	76%
Their life was going well	73%	66%
They had what they wanted in life	59%	53%
Their life was going just right	57%	52%
They wished they had a different life	17%	20%

The majority of youth (60%) felt happy most or all of the time in the past month, while 30% felt happy some of the time, 9% only a little of the time, and 1% never felt happy. Those in higher grades were the least likely to feel happy most or all of the time (e.g., 53% in Grade 12 vs. 69% in Grade 7).

The percentage who felt happy most or all of the time decreased over the past decade, from 68% in 2013, to 65% in 2018, to 60% in 2023.

Self-confidence and sense of competence

"I think I'm really good at helping others when they are in tough situations, I think a lot of my friends trust me and come to me when something happens."

Grade 10 student

Just over half of youth (52%) felt good about themselves (vs. 59% in 2018), and 73% could identify something they were good at (vs. 79% in 2018). They commonly listed they were good at sports, the arts, school, relational skills, cooking/baking, and playing video games.

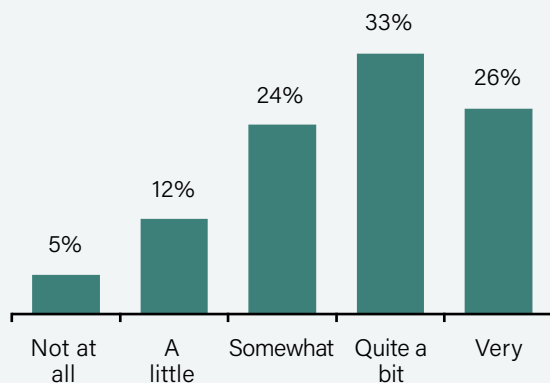
Hopefulness

"I hope that tomorrow is even better."

Grade 10 student

The majority of youth (59%) felt quite or very hopeful for their future (a decrease from 66% in 2018).

How hopeful students felt for their future



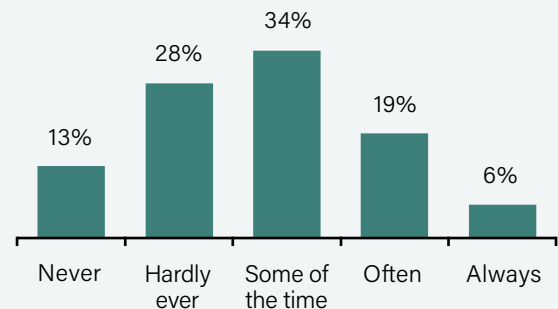
Loneliness

"I feel lonely even though I have what I need."

Grade 11 student

A quarter of youth often or always felt lonely, with students in higher grades more likely to feel this way (e.g., 28% in Grade 12 vs. 16% in Grade 7).

How often students felt lonely



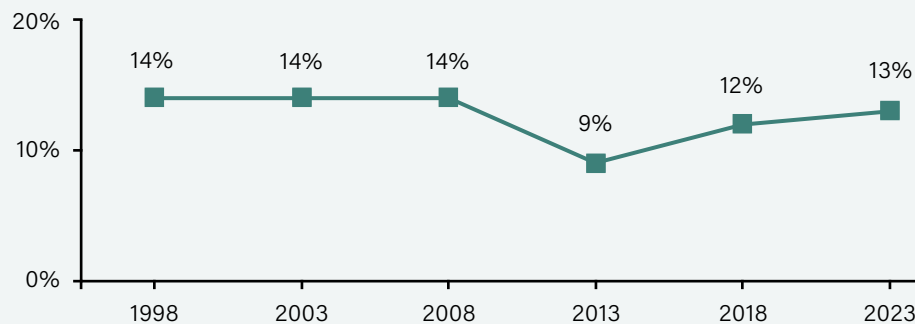
Stress and despair

"I am constantly stressed to the point that I have a headache."

Grade 12 student

Most youth (89%) experienced at least a little stress in the past month, including 13% who were so stressed they could not function properly. The percentage who experienced extreme stress increased over the past decade, but remained below the rate 15–25 years earlier.

Students who experienced extreme stress in the past 30 days

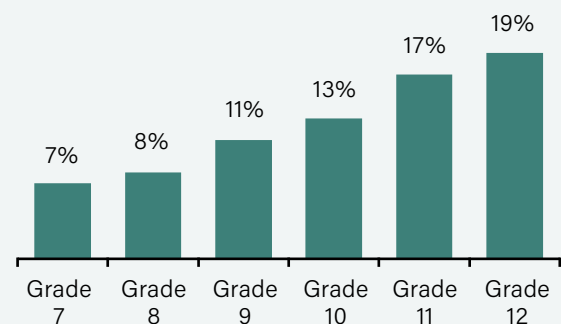


Around half of youth (49%) who experienced stress felt that they handled their stress well or very well, while the rest felt they managed it poorly (20%) or only fairly well (31%). Compared to 5 years earlier, youth were less likely to feel they managed their stress well or very well (54% in 2018).

Students in higher grades were more likely to experience extreme stress, and were less likely to feel they managed their stress well (e.g., 57% in Grade 7 managed their stress well or very well vs. 49% in Grade 9 vs. 46% in Grade 11).

In the past month, 63% of youth experienced some level of despair. This included 8% who felt so sad, hopeless, or discouraged that they wondered if anything was worthwhile. The percentage who experienced extreme despair was similar to 5 years earlier and slightly higher than in other years (e.g., 7% in 1998, 2003, and 2013).

Students in higher grades were more likely to experience extreme stress in the past 30 days



Note: The difference between Grade 11 and Grade 12 was not statistically significant.

Self-harm and suicidality

"I have not cut in the past 2 months."

Grade 10 student

In the past year, 24% of youth had cut or injured themselves on purpose without trying to kill themselves (including 17% who had self-harmed on multiple occasions). The percentage who self-harmed increased over the past decade (15% had self-harmed in 2013, and 17% in 2018).

Students in Grades 7 to 9 were generally more likely to have self-harmed than students in Grades 10 to 12 (e.g., 26% in Grade 7 vs. 21% in Grade 12).

Youth also reported engaging in deliberate self-harm other than cutting in the past year, including starving themselves, over-exercising or exercising with an injury, and using substances.

Types of self-harm youth engaged in during the past 12 months (excluding cutting)

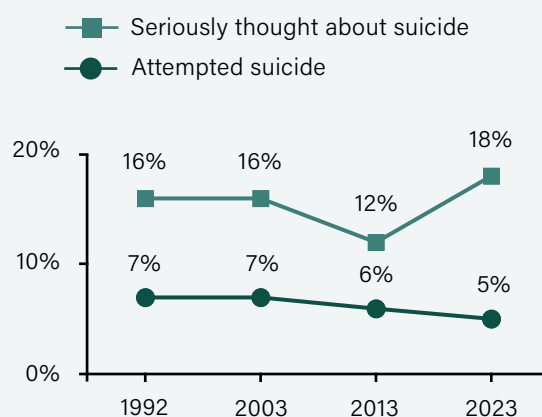
Starved self	17%
Over-exercised or exercised while injured	11%
Used alcohol or other substances	10%
Made a medical situation worse	4%
Got into a physical fight	4%
Had unsafe sex	3%
Drove recklessly	2%
Overdosed	1%
Overused laxatives	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

In the past 12 months, 18% of youth seriously considered killing themselves. This percentage was comparable to 2018, and higher than previous years.

Just over 5% of youth had attempted suicide in the past 12 months. This was higher than the percentage in 2018 (just under 5%), but lower than the percentages 10 to 30 years previously.

Students who seriously thought about and attempted suicide in the past 12 months



Note: For attempted suicide, the difference between 2003 and 2013 was not statistically significant.

Rates of suicidal ideation increased from Grade 7 to Grade 9 then remained comparable through later grades (e.g., 14% of Grade 7 students seriously considered suicide in the past year vs. 19% in Grade 9 and Grade 12). Rates of suicide attempts also increased from Grade 7 to 9, but then decreased again (e.g., 5% of students in Grade 7 and Grade 11 attempted suicide in the past year vs. 6% in Grade 9).

Overall, 29% of youth had a relative or close friend who had attempted or died by suicide, including 13% who had this experience in the past year.

Specific conditions

“MY ADHD can be a major hindrance when trying to meet deadlines and focus in class.”

Grade 12 student

Youth were asked about some specific conditions. They most commonly reported having an anxiety disorder, followed by ADHD. The percentage with ADHD and autism more than doubled in 5 years, and there were increases in other conditions. However, there was a decrease in those reporting depression.

Specific conditions and disabilities		
	2018	2023
Anxiety disorder	18%	22%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ADD)	7%	18%
Depression	15%	14%
Eating disorder	N/A	7%
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)	N/A	6%
Alcohol or other substance use addiction	3%	5%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	3%	5%
Autism spectrum disorder	1%	4%
Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD/FAS/FAE)	<1%	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.
N/A: The item was not included on the 2018 survey.

Students in higher grades were more likely to report having various mental health conditions, including:

- An anxiety disorder (e.g., 23% in Grade 9 vs. 20% in Grade 8).
- Depression (e.g., 17% in Grade 11 vs. 13% in Grade 9 vs. 9% in Grade 7).
- An eating disorder (e.g., 10% in Grade 12 vs. 8% in Grade 10 vs. 6% in Grade 8).
- PTSD (e.g., 6% in Grade 12 vs. 3% in Grade 7).
- A substance use addiction (e.g., 7% in Grade 11 vs. 5% in Grade 9 vs. 2% in Grade 7).



Access to mental health services

"I am not sure as to where I can go to get mental health services other than my family doctor. Most of the places in my community have long waiting lists."

Grade 12 student

In the past 12 months, 71% of youth felt they had not needed mental health services, while 11% were able to access the services they needed, and 18% did not get the services they felt they needed.

Youth were as likely as 5 years earlier to have missed out on needed mental health services, and more likely to have missed out than a decade earlier (11% in 2013).

Not wanting their parents to know was the most common reason youth missed out on needed mental health care. However, the percentage reporting this reason decreased from 2018.

Reasons youth did not access mental health services in the past 12 months (among those who felt they needed these services)		
	2018	2023
Didn't want parent/guardian to know	62%	58%
Thought or hoped the problem would go away	63%	54%
Didn't know where to go	44%	45%
Worried their information wouldn't be kept confidential	N/A	42%
Afraid of what they would be told	44%	37%
Too busy to go	36%	36%
Afraid someone they knew might see them	37%	31%
Didn't think they could afford it	22%	26%
Parent/guardian wouldn't take them	12%	19%
Had negative experience(s) before	14%	16%
Had no transportation	10%	9%
On a waiting list	5%	7%
Couldn't go when it was open	5%	4%
The service was not available in their community	2%	2%

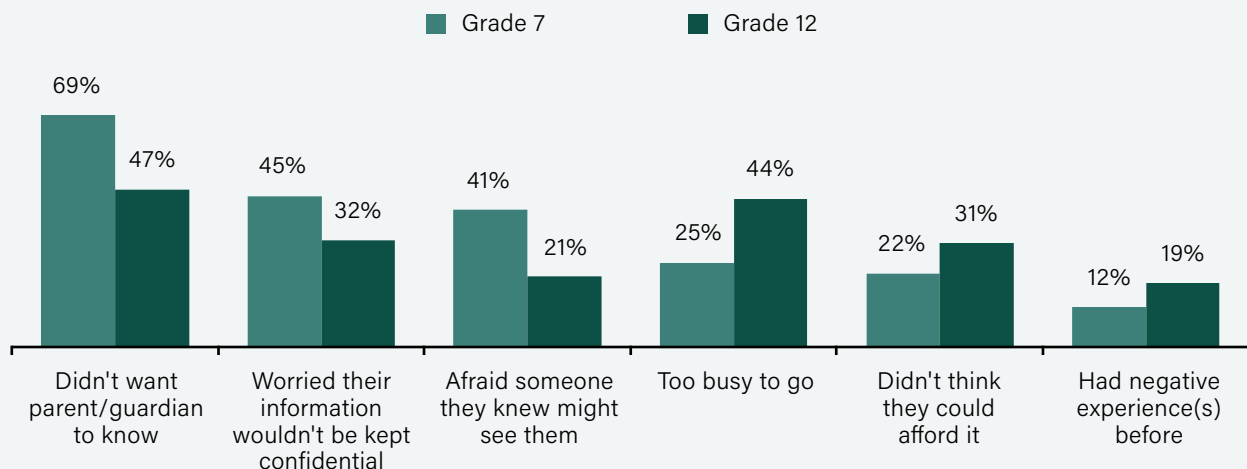
N/A: The item was not included in the 2018 survey.

Note: The change over time was not statistically significant for didn't know where to go and had no transportation.

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Students in higher grades were more likely to have missed out on needed mental health services in the past year (e.g., 25% in Grade 12 missed out vs. 18% in Grade 10 vs. 14% in Grade 8). Among youth who did not access the care they needed, those in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to be worried about their privacy.

Grade differences in reasons students did not access needed mental health services in the past 12 months



Virtual services

"I'd like to know where online (and private) supports can be found."

Grade 9 student

In the past 12 months, 14% of youth accessed virtual counselling or treatment for their mental health. This included 9% who preferred it to in-person counselling, and 5% who would have preferred in-person counselling.

Accessing reliable mental health information

"I want to learn more about the process of mental health care and getting a diagnosis."

Grade 9 student

When asked where they went for reliable information on mental health, youth most commonly reported going to a family member, followed by a friend or peer.

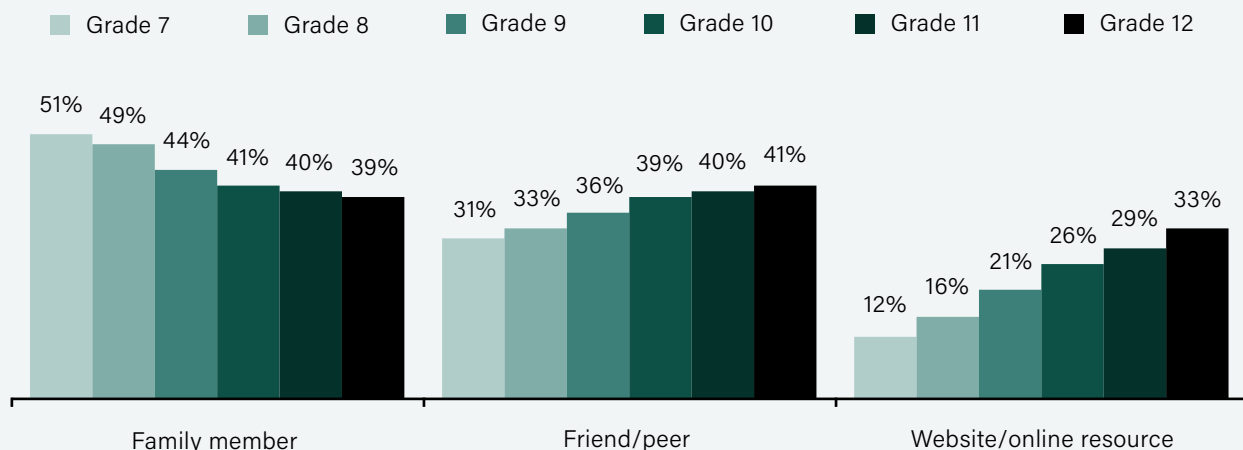
Students in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to approach a family member for reliable information on mental health. Students in higher grades were more likely to go to friends/peers, websites/online resources, mental health professionals (e.g., 20% in Grade 12 vs. 12% in Grade 7), and school staff (e.g., 17% in Grade 12 vs. 13% in Grade 7) for this information.

Where youth accessed reliable information about mental health

Family member	44%
Friend/peer	37%
Website/online resource	23%
Mental health professional	16%
School staff	13%
Another source	2%
Didn't know where to go	7%
Didn't go anywhere for this information	27%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Where students in different grades went to access reliable information on mental health



Note: Not all changes across grades were statistically significant.

Gender differences in mental health

"I want to learn more about gender identity and mental health."

Grade 12 student

Males were the least likely to have engaged in most forms of deliberate self-harm other than cutting, such as starving themselves (6% vs. 27% of females vs. 39% of non-binary youth), over-exercising or exercising while injured (9% vs. 12% vs. 17%), and using substances (6% vs. 13% vs. 16%). However, females were the least likely to deliberately get into a physical fight (3% vs. 5% of males and non-binary youth).

This report shows that females were generally more likely than males to experience social exclusion, trauma, stigma, victimization, abuse, harassment and discrimination; and non-binary youth were the most likely to have these experiences. These are all factors that can affect mental health, and might in part explain why males were the most likely to report positive mental health and well-being, and non-binary youth were the least likely.

Gender differences in mental health and well-being			
	Males	Females	Non-binary youth
Rated their mental health as good or excellent	73%	50%	22%
Could identify something they were good at	77%	70%	65%
Experienced extreme despair in the past month	5%	10%	22%
Self-harmed in the past year	14%	31%	55%
Seriously considered suicide in the past year	11%	22%	47%
Attempted suicide in the past year	3%	7%	17%
Did not access needed mental health services in the past year	9%	26%	44%

When it came to accessing reliable information on mental health, males were the least likely to access most sources, and were the most likely to report not going anywhere for this information (e.g., 33% vs. 22% of females). However, non-binary youth were the least likely to go to a family member for mental health information (e.g., 26% vs. 44% of females).

Compared to 2018, there were increases in reporting most mental health conditions for youth of all genders. For example, ADHD increased for males (from 8% to 18%), females (from 5% to 15%), and non-binary youth (from 17% to 37%). An exception was depression, which saw decreases for males (from 10% to 8%), females (from 19% to 17%), and non-binary youth (from 45% to 39%).

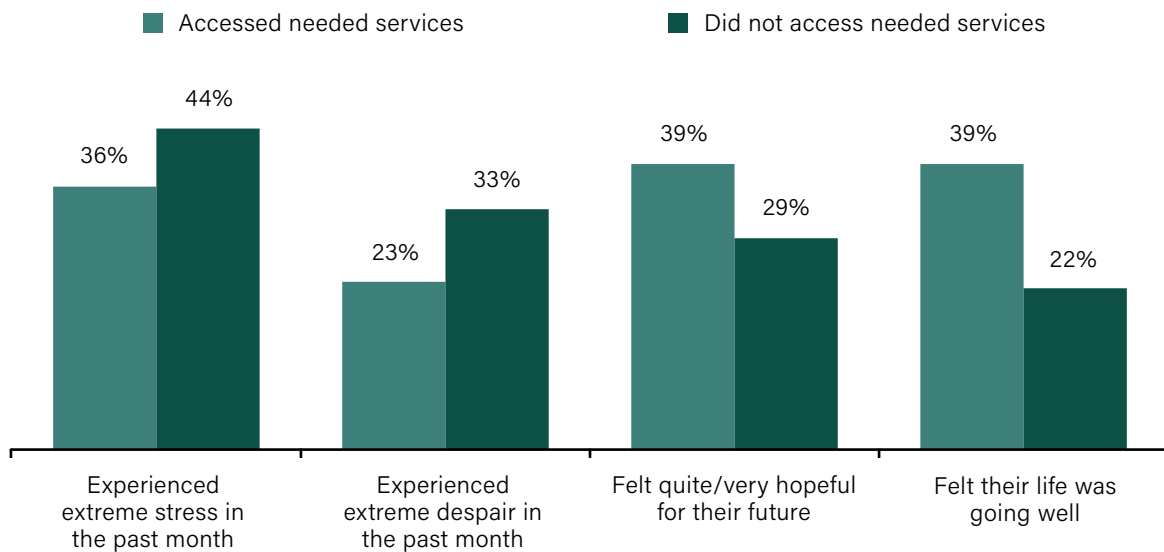
Gender differences in specific conditions			
	Males	Females	Non-binary youth
Anxiety disorder	10%	33%	50%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ADD)	18%	15%	37%
Depression	8%	17%	39%
Eating disorder	2%	12%	20%
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)	4%	7%	12%
Alcohol or other substance use addiction	4%	5%	9%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	2%	6%	13%
Autism spectrum disorder	4%	2%	18%
Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD/FAS/FAE)	1%	<1%	2%



Why is access to mental health resources important?

Having access to reliable information about mental health and to mental health services can contribute to better mental health and well-being. For example, among youth who reported having a mental health condition (such as depression or bipolar disorder), those who accessed the mental health services they needed in the past year were less likely than those who did not get needed services to report extreme levels of stress and despair in the past month. Also, they were more likely to feel hopeful for their future and to feel their life was going well.

Youth who accessed needed mental health services reported better mental health and well-being *(among those who had a mental health condition)*



Eating behaviours and body image

As young people gain more autonomy during adolescence, their eating habits may change, including eating out more, snacking, and skipping meals. Their perception of their body shape can also lead them to skip meals and control their eating behaviours.

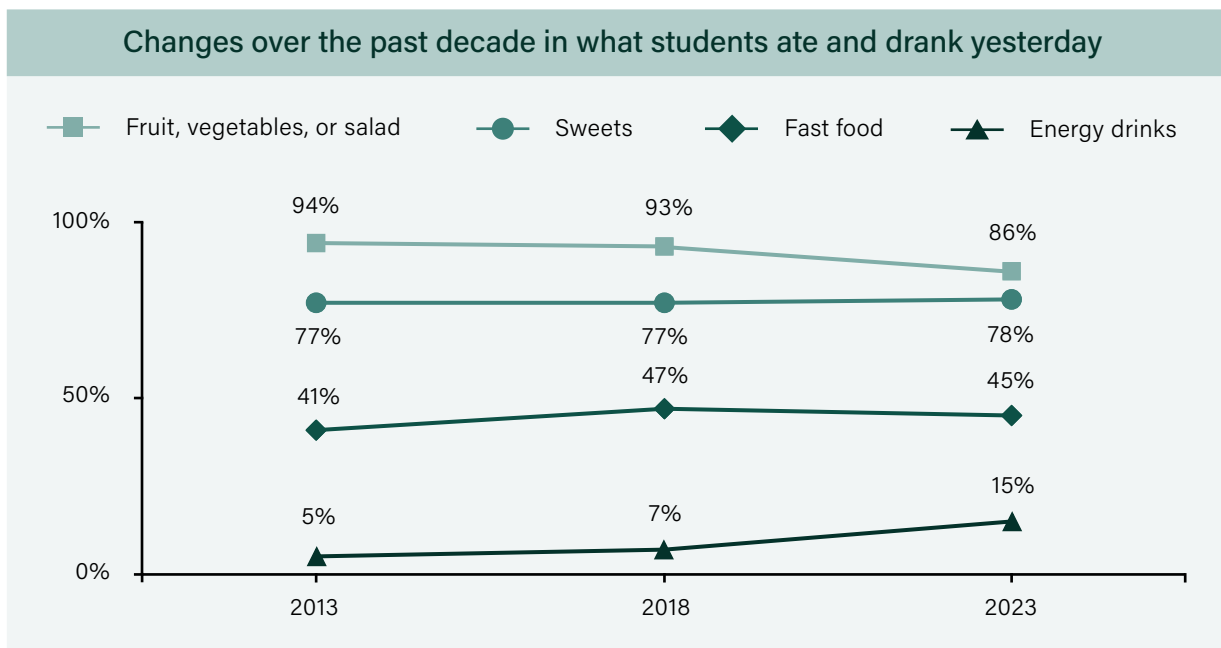
Food consumption

"Food is too expensive."

Grade 12 student

Youth were asked about meals and snacks they had consumed on the day before taking the survey. Around 4 in 10 ate traditional food from their background, which was similar to the rate in 2018 and higher than a decade earlier (42% vs. 38% in 2013).

The percentage who ate fruit, vegetables, and/or salad was the lowest in 15 years (86% vs. 91% in 2008). Compared to a decade earlier, there was a slight rise in eating sweets, and a rise in eating fast food (although fast food consumption was lower than in 2018). The percentage who drank energy drinks more than doubled in the past 5 years.



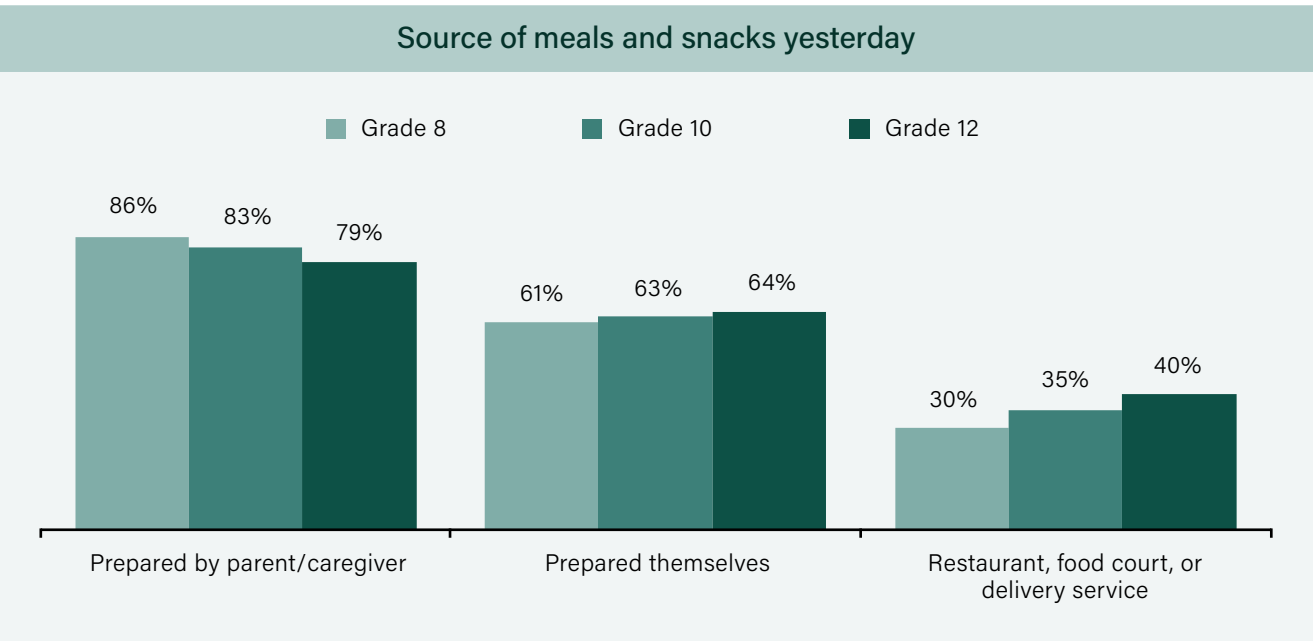
Youth in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to eat fruit, vegetables, and/or salad and were less likely to have consumed fast food and energy drinks. For example, 28% of Grade 7 students ate fruit, vegetables, and/or salad at least three times on the day before the survey, compared to 21% of Grade 10 students.

The day before completing the survey, youth most commonly ate food prepared by their parent/care-giver (83%) and food they prepared themselves (62%). Also, 34% had food from a restaurant, food court, or delivery service; and 5% had food they had taken home from a school food program.

Youth in lower grades were more likely to report their food was prepared by a parent/caregiver, whereas those in higher grades were more likely to prepare their own food and to have eaten food from a restaurant, food court, or delivery service.

In the past week, around 4 in 5 youth ate dinner every day but fewer ate breakfast and lunch that regularly. Youth in higher grades were less likely to eat meals consistently over the past week. For example, 74% of Grade 12s ate dinner every day, compared to 78% of Grade 10s and 82% of Grade 8s.

Meals eaten in the past 7 days					
	0 days	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-6 days	All 7 days
Breakfast	15%	17%	12%	14%	42%
Lunch	5%	10%	13%	17%	55%
Dinner	1%	2%	6%	12%	79%



Note: For food students prepared themselves, the differences between Grade 8 and 10 and between Grade 10 and 12 were not statistically significant.

The percentage of students who ate breakfast on school days decreased (71% vs. 82% in 2018), as did the percentage who got their breakfast at school (6% vs. 7% in 2018). Youth in higher grades were the least likely to eat breakfast at home and the most likely to eat breakfast on the way to school. For example, 63% of Grade 12 youth ate breakfast at home on school days (vs. 67% of Grade 9 and 10 students vs. 75% of Grade 7 students).

Where youth got breakfast on school days	
Didn't eat breakfast on school days	29%
At home	68%
At school	6%
On the way to school	6%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Disordered eating and body image

"I have anorexia and bulimia but no one seems to be able to help."

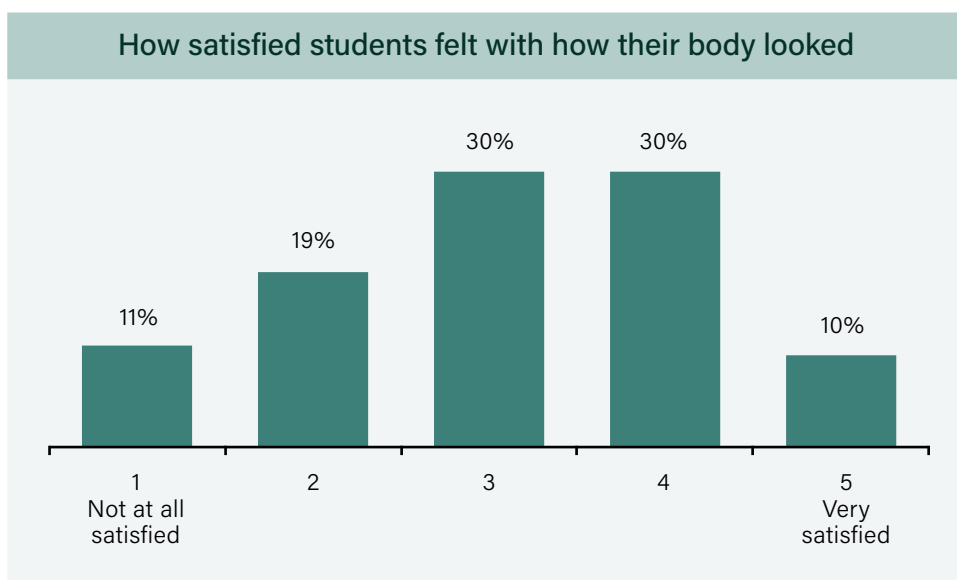
Grade 10 student

In the past 30 days, 32% of youth worried that they had lost control of how much they ate.

Engaging in purging behaviour increased over the past decade. In the past 12 months, 14% of youth vomited on purpose after eating (vs. 12% in 2018 and 8% in 2013), including 2% who did so at least weekly (vs. 1% in both 2018 and 2013).

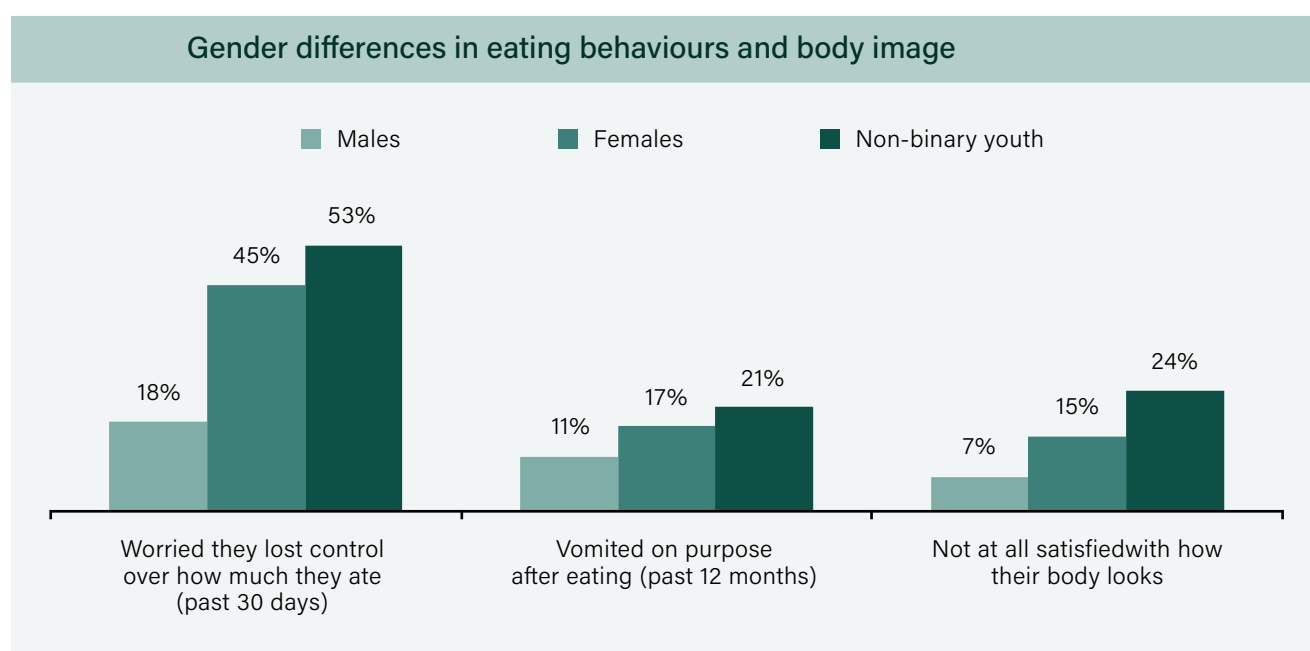
Feeling they had lost control over how much they ate was more common among youth in higher grades (e.g., 37% in Grade 12 vs. 24% in Grade 7); while feeling satisfied with how their body looked decreased from Grade 7 to Grade 9 (from 46% to 38%) and then remained constant through Grade 12. The percentage who purged was generally consistent across grades.

One in 10 youth felt very satisfied with how their body looked, and a similar percentage (11%) were not at all satisfied.



Gender differences in eating behaviours and body image

There were some gender differences in youth's eating behaviours. For example, males were the most likely to have their food prepared by their parent/caregiver, to eat three meals a day, and to eat breakfast at home (74% ate breakfast at home vs. 62% of females vs. 55% of non-binary youth). Non-binary youth were the least likely to be satisfied with how their body looked, and the most likely to be engaging in disordered eating behaviours.



Why is healthy eating important?

Engaging in healthy eating behaviours was associated with both physical and mental well-being. For example, the more often youth ate breakfast in the past week, the more likely they were to report good or excellent mental health (e.g., 76% who ate breakfast daily vs. 44% who did so on 1 or 2 days) and good or excellent overall health (85% vs. 62%).

In addition, those who regularly ate fruit, vegetables, and/or salad reported better sleep. For example, 52% of those who ate these three or more times the previous day had slept for at least 8 hours that night, compared to 41% who ate these once, and 29% who did not eat any that day.

Sexual health

Sexual health can become an increasingly important aspect of health and well-being during adolescence. It is a time when young people need to be supported to develop the knowledge and skills to avoid unwanted sexual activity, protect themselves if they become sexually active, and reduce the risk of a sexually transmitted infection or unwanted pregnancy.

Oral sex

"I want to learn how to lower my risk of an STI during oral sex."

Grade 12 student

Youth were first asked about oral sex on the 2008 BC AHS. At that time, just over a quarter (26%) reported having had oral sex. The rate has subsequently declined to 17% in 2023.

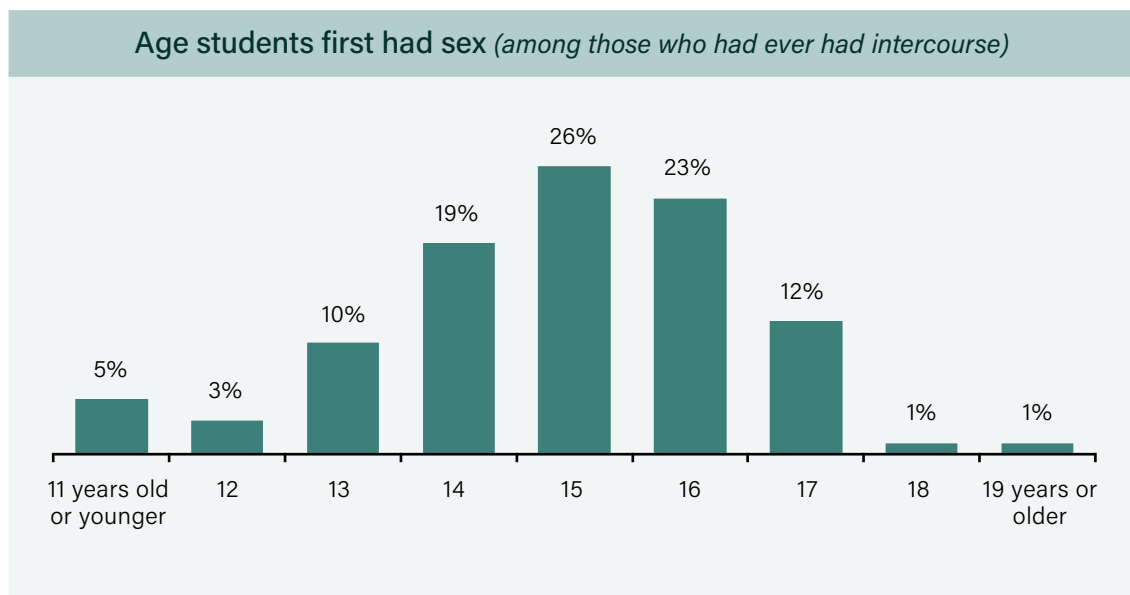
As would be anticipated, students in higher grades were more likely than those in lower grades to have engaged in oral sex. For example, 2% of Grade 7 students had ever had oral sex, compared to 9% of Grade 9 students and 30% of those in Grade 11.

Sexual intercourse

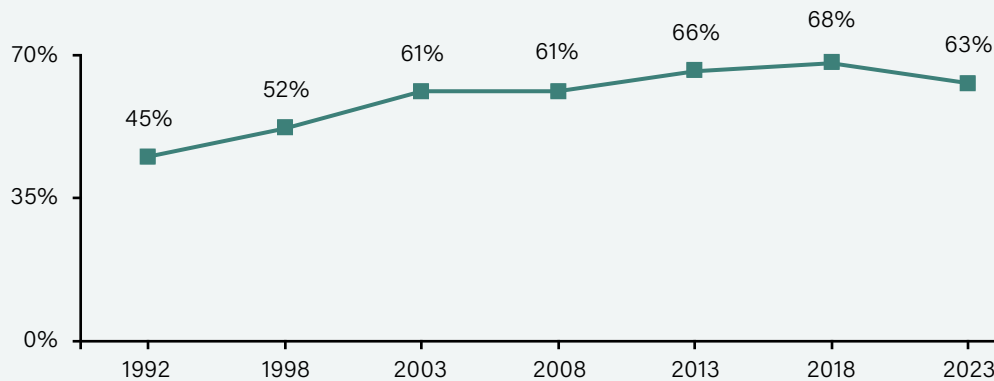
"The lack of sex education given to secondary school students (who may be having sex with one another) is frustrating beyond belief."

Grade 12 student

The percentage of youth who had ever engaged in sex other than oral sex or masturbation declined over the past 30 years (from 30% in 1992 to 16% in 2023). Among those who had ever had sex, the most common age to first do so was 15 or 16 years old.



First had sex at age 15 or older (among students who ever had intercourse)



The percentage of youth who were at least 15 years old the first time they had sex increased from 1992 to 2018. However, the percentage decreased between 2018 and 2023.

Among youth who had ever had sexual intercourse, 84% had been sexually active in the past 12 months, including 17% who had two partners, and 15% who had three or more partners.

Forced sex

"I wasn't forced to have sex with anyone, but I was coerced."

Grade 12 student

When asked specifically if they had been forced into sexual activity against their will, 7% of students reported they had been forced into sexual activity by another youth, and 2% by an adult. Males were the least likely to have been forced to have sex against their will (4% vs. 12% of females vs. 18% of non-binary youth).

Protection against sexually transmitted infections

"I want to learn more about STDs and how they can be transmitted from same-sex couples, and how to tell if you have one."

Grade 8 student

Among all youth, 1% reported they had ever had a sexually transmitted infection, a rate which has remained unchanged over the past decade.

Among youth who had ever had oral sex, 19% used a condom or other barrier the last time they had oral sex, which was higher than in previous survey years (17% in 2013 and 2018). Students in Grades 11 and 12 were less likely than those in lower grades to have used protection the last time they had oral sex (e.g., 15% of Grade 12s vs. 25% of Grade 9s).

Among youth who had ever had intercourse, there was a decrease in the percentage who used a condom or other barrier, from a peak of 69% in 2013, to 57% in 2023 (a return to the rate reported 30 years ago).

Similar to the pattern with oral sex, Grade 10 students were more likely than those in Grade 12 to have used a condom the last time they had sex (62% vs. 55% of Grade 12s).

Pregnancy involvement

"I had an abortion in the last 12 months."

Grade 10 student

Similar to results over the past decade, 1% of youth reported they had been pregnant or got somebody pregnant. Also, 1% were unsure if they had been involved in a pregnancy.

Youth who had engaged in sexual intercourse were asked if they had made any efforts to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sex. Condoms remained the most commonly used method to prevent pregnancy, but condom use decreased over the past decade (from 64% in 2013 to 53%).

Around 4 in 10 youth used withdrawal (an unreliable method to prevent pregnancy), and 11% indicated withdrawal was the only method they used to prevent pregnancy. This was higher than any previous survey year (e.g., 7% in 2013 and 4% in 2003 used withdrawal exclusively). Also, the percentage who were unsure of the method they or their partner had used to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sex was highest in 2023 (e.g., 5% vs. 3% in 2018).

Method(s) youth used to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sex (among those who had ever had intercourse)

Condoms	53%
Withdrawal	39%
Birth control pills, birth control patch, NuvaRing, or other method prescribed by doctor or nurse	31%
Emergency contraception	10%
IUD	7%
Depo-Provera	1%
Not sure	5%
Did not try to prevent pregnancy	3%
Last sex was with a same sex partner	8%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Sex education at school

"There needs to be a required and regular sex education program for all high school students of all grades weekly."

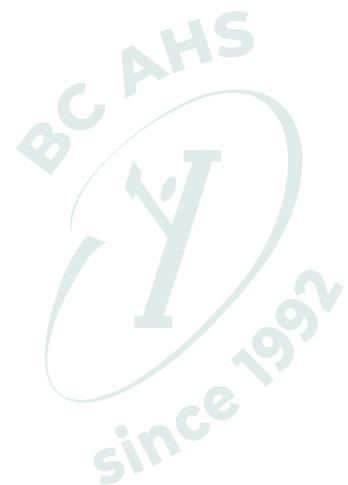
Grade 12 student

For the first time, the BC AHS asked youth about their views on the sexual health education they received at school. In total, 80% reported receiving sex education at school, including 50% who found it helpful and 30% who did not find it helpful.

Youth who received sex education were asked whether this education had met their needs:

- 82% felt the sex education they received had started at the right age for them.
- 84% felt it was relevant to their gender identity.
- 79% felt it was relevant to their sexual orientation.
- 58% felt it was relevant to any disability or health condition they had.
- 84% felt it was respectful of their culture/religion.

Youth in higher grades were less likely to indicate the sex education they received at school had been helpful, and to feel that it started at the right age. For example, 57% of Grade 12 students who received sex education found it helpful, compared to 64% of Grade 9 students.



Accessing reliable sexual health information

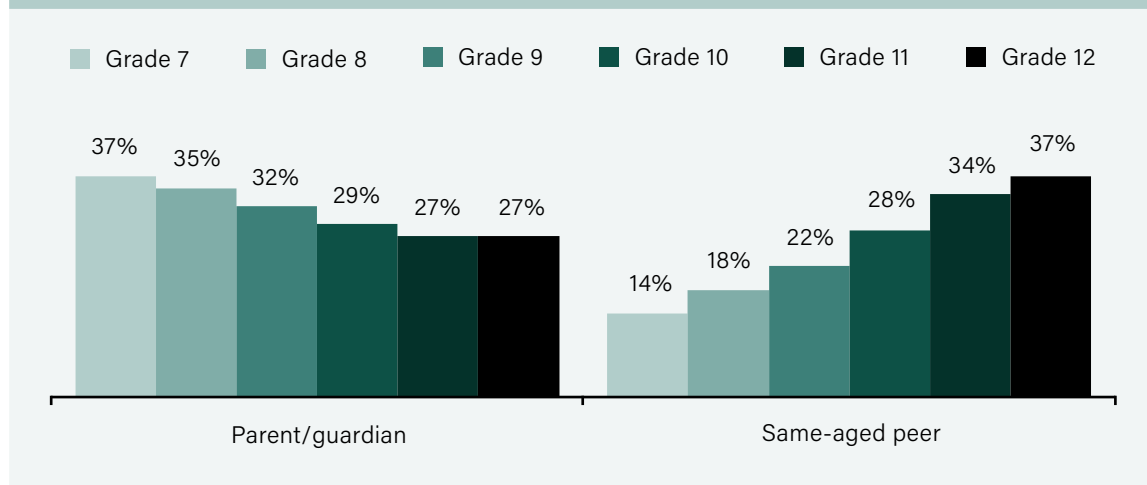
Youth who wanted reliable information about sexual health commonly approached their parents and peers, and also looked to online resources for this information.

In general, students in higher grades were more likely to seek out sexual health information. However, they were less likely to go to parents or school staff for this information, and were slightly more likely to not know where to go for reliable information.

Where youth accessed reliable information about sexual health

Parent/guardian	31%
A same-aged friend or peer	26%
Website/online resource	24%
An older youth	15%
Sexual health professional	10%
Other family member	9%
School staff	8%
Adult outside their family	5%
Pornography	4%
Printed resource (e.g., book, brochure, poster)	3%
Other professional	3%
Didn't know where to go	6%
Didn't go anywhere	38%

Where students in different grades went to access reliable information about sexual health



Note: For parent/guardian, not all changes across grades were statistically significant.

Gender differences in sexual health

There were no gender differences in whether youth had ever had oral sex or intercourse, or in using protection during oral sex. However, there were some other gender differences. For example:

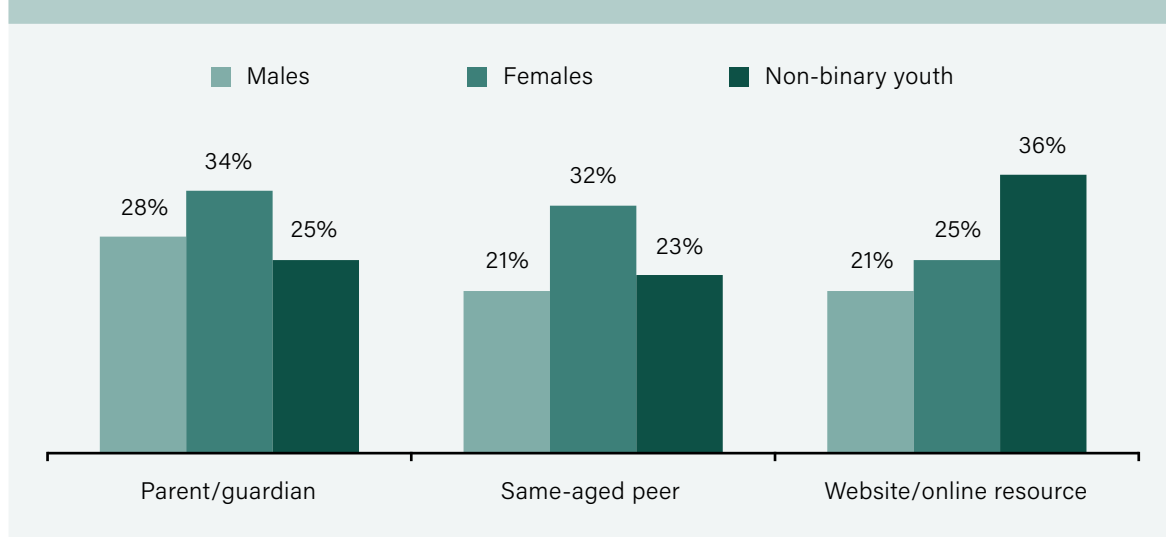
- Non-binary youth were the most likely to have first had intercourse before the age of 15, to have been involved in a pregnancy, and to have had an STI (e.g., 3% had an STI vs. 1% of males and females). Also, they were the least likely to know where to go for reliable sexual health information, and to feel that the sex education they received at school met their needs.
- Males were the most likely to have used a condom or other barrier the last time they had intercourse (61% vs. 54% of females and 36% of non-binary youth who had ever had sex).
- Females were the most likely to get their sexual health information from same-aged and older friends, parents, and other family members; and were the least likely to use pornography as a source of reliable information (e.g., 2% vs. 6% of non-binary youth).

Why is access to reliable sexual health information important?

Having access to reliable sexual health information and supplies was associated with safer sexual practices. For example, among those who had ever had sex:

- Youth who found sex education they received at school to be helpful were more likely to have used a condom or other protection the last time they had sex (59% vs. 54% who did not find it helpful).
- Youth who used protection were about half as likely to have a history of pregnancy involvement (3% vs. 7% who did not use protection) or STIs (2% vs. 4%).

Gender differences in where students accessed reliable information about sexual health



Note: The difference between male and non-binary youth was not statistically significant for accessing information from a same-aged peer.

Substance use

Youth were asked about their vaping and smoking, as well as their use of alcohol, cannabis, and other substances. They were also asked about their reasons for using substances and the consequences of their use.

Over half of youth (57%) who had tried vaping had vaped in the past 30 days, including 15% who had done so daily. Among youth who vaped daily, three quarters vaped within 30 minutes of waking up.

Vaping

"I sometimes feel like I disappoint my family because I vape."

Grade 12 student

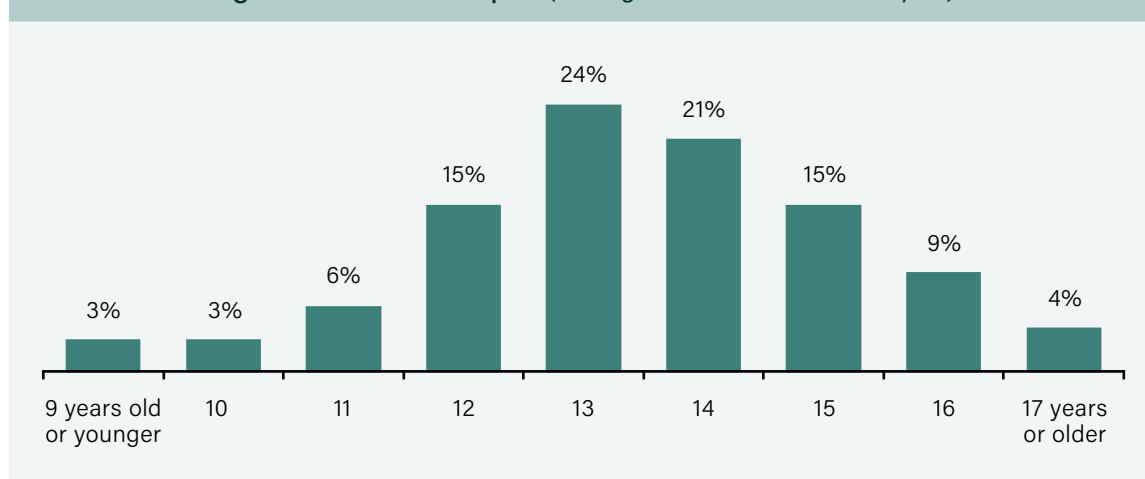
Overall, 26% of youth had ever vaped. They most commonly had their first vape at age 13, and just over a quarter (28%) vaped for the first time at age 15 or older.

In 2018, youth were not asked if they had ever vaped. However, the percentage who had ever vaped in 2023 was lower than the 27% who had vaped in the past month in 2018.

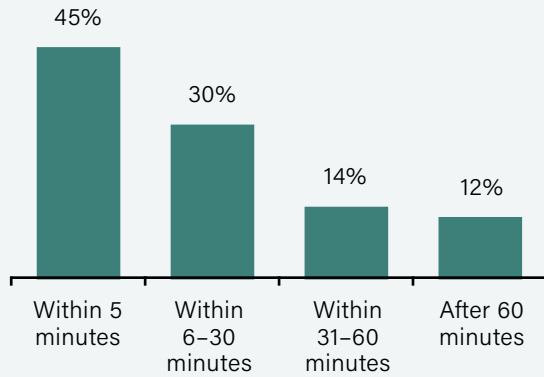
Number of days youth vaped in the past 30 days (among those who had ever vaped)

0 days	43%
1 or 2 days	15%
3 to 5 days	6%
6 to 9 days	5%
10 to 19 days	8%
20 to 29 days	8%
All 30 days	15%

Age students first vaped (among those who had ever vaped)



How soon students had their first vape after waking up (among those who vaped daily)



Note: Percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Among youth who vaped in the past 30 days, 7% used a product to help them stop vaping during this time.

There are concerns that vaping may be leading to tobacco smoking among young people, and this appeared to be the case among BC youth. Among youth who had vaped and smoked, they were over 3 times as likely to have vaped first than they were to have smoked first. Also, youth who had smoked and vaped were more likely to have first vaped at age 12 or younger than they were to have first smoked at that age (34% vs. 23%).

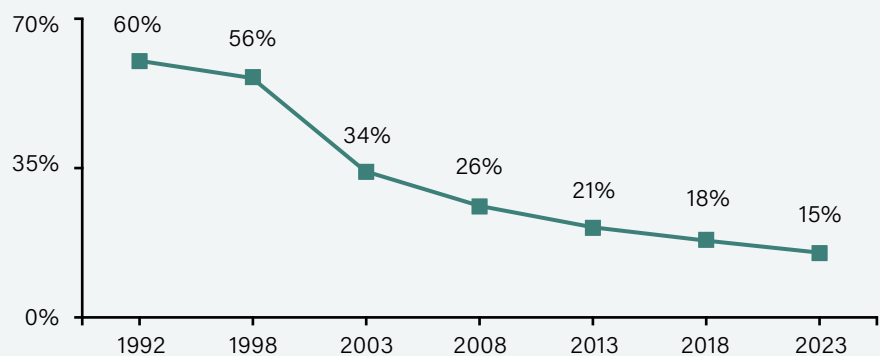
Smoking

"I smoke every day."

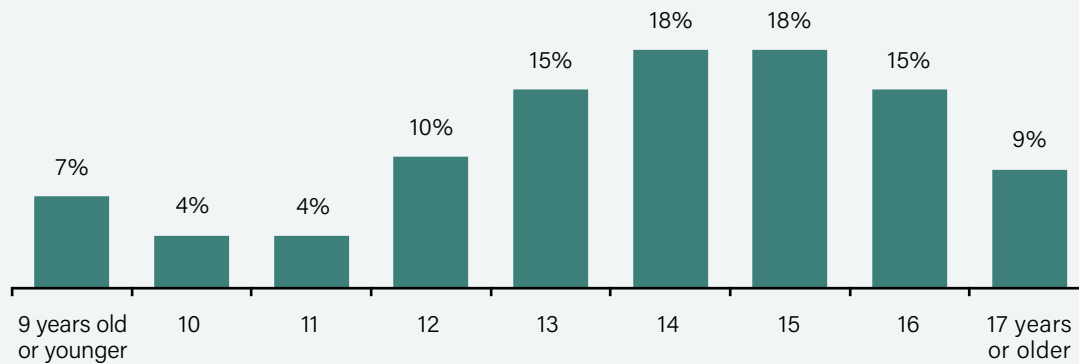
Grade 12 student

There has been a decrease over the past 30 years in the percentage of youth who had ever smoked tobacco. In 2023, 15% of youth had smoked tobacco, including 2% who had smoked tobacco exclusively, and 13% who had both smoked and vaped (another 13% of youth vaped exclusively).

Decreases over time in the percentage of students who had ever smoked tobacco



Age students first smoked tobacco (among those who had ever smoked)



Despite the decreases over time in the percentage of youth who had smoked tobacco, youth who did smoke were more likely to have first smoked at age 12 or younger (just over 24% vs. 20% in 2018).

Among youth who had tried smoking, 40% smoked in the past 30 days. They most commonly did so on 1 or 2 days. One in 10 of those who smoked in the past month used a product to help them stop smoking during that time (excluding vapes).

Number of days youth smoked in the past 30 days (among those who had ever smoked)

0 days	60%
1 or 2 days	22%
3 to 5 days	6%
6 to 9 days	4%
10 to 19 days	4%
20 to 29 days	2%
All 30 days	3%

Note: Percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Youth had used a variety of tobacco products in the past month, including cigarettes (6% vs. 7% in 2018), cigars/cigarillos (2% vs. 3% in 2018), chewing tobacco (1% vs. 2% in 2018), and a hookah (1% vs. 2% in 2018).

Alcohol

"I struggled with alcohol from age 14-16."

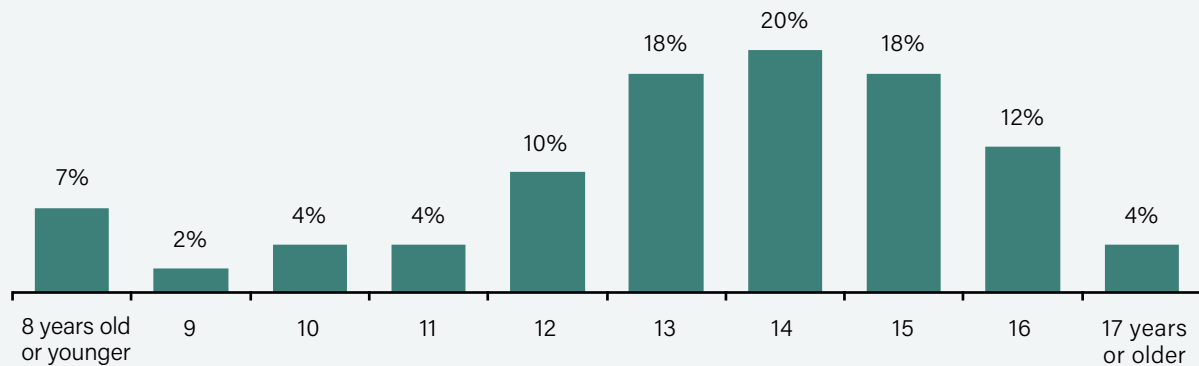
Grade 11 student

The Canadian Low Risk Drinking Guidelines recommend that youth do not drink until they are of legal drinking age. However, if they decide to drink, the guidelines suggest they should not drink alcohol more than once or twice a week, and that they should never have more than two drinks on any one occasion ([ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Youth-and-Alcohol-Summary-2014-en.pdf](https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Youth-and-Alcohol-Summary-2014-en.pdf)).

Just under 4 in 10 youth (38%) had tried alcohol (beyond a few sips), which was lower than at any point in the last 30 years (e.g., 45% in 2013, 58% in 2003, and 67% in 1992). Those who had tried alcohol most commonly first did so at age 14 (20%).

Reflecting the pattern for tobacco smoking, youth who drank alcohol were more likely than in past survey years to have first done so before they entered high school (e.g., 28% first drank at age 12 or younger vs. 23% in 2018). They were also less likely to wait until they were at least 15 years old to first try alcohol (34% vs. 37%).

Age students first drank alcohol (among those who had ever used alcohol)



Note: Percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Among youth who had ever used alcohol:

- 60% drank in the past month (most commonly on 1 or 2 days).
- 34% had five or more drinks within a couple of hours on at least 1 day in the past month, and 1% drank this heavily on 20 or more days.
- 26% had more than two drinks on at least 1 day in the past week, including 5% who did so on 3 or more days, and 1% who did so daily.
- 31% drank on the Saturday before completing the survey. They most commonly drank liquor.

Number of days youth drank alcohol in the past 30 days (among those who had ever used alcohol)

0 days	40%
1 or 2 days	33%
3 to 5 days	14%
6 to 9 days	7%
10 to 19 days	3%
20 to 29 days	1%
All 30 days	1%

Note: Percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Types of alcohol youth drank last Saturday (among those who used alcohol that day)

Liquor	68%
Coolers	53%
Beer	33%
Wine	13%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Cannabis

***"I did weed twice but only got high once.
My sister gave it to me."***

Grade 10 student

Lower-risk cannabis use guidelines for youth were recently developed by researchers at the University of Victoria (Card et al., 2023: uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/youth-cannabis-guidelines.pdf).

The researchers recommend youth wait until they are older before using cannabis; "start low and go slow" with the amount they consume; know the source of their cannabis and what it might contain; and be aware of the health risks associated with the various modes of consumption.

In 2023, 22% of youth had ever used cannabis, which was a decrease from previous survey years (e.g., 25% in 2018, 30% in 2008, and 41% in 1998). Youth who had used cannabis had most commonly first tried it at age 14 or 15.

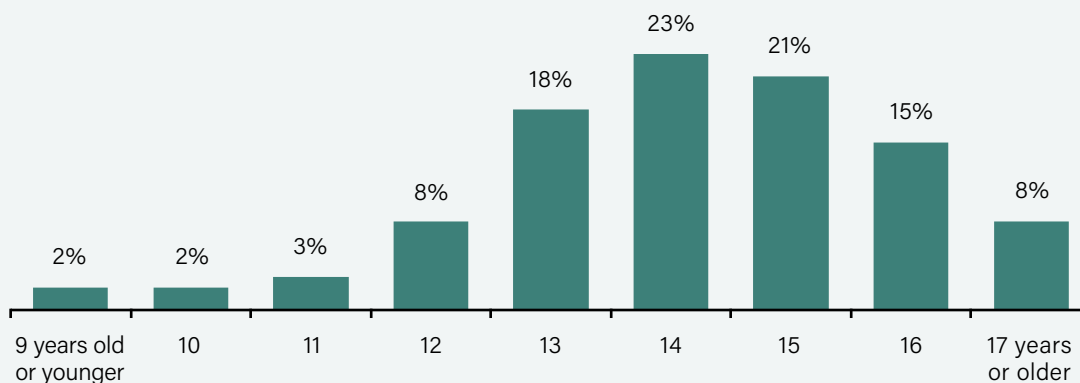
Compared to 5 years earlier, there was a slight increase in youth who used cannabis for the first time at age 12 or younger (15% vs. 14% in 2018), and a decrease in the percentage who waited until they were 15 or older to try it (44% vs. 47% in 2018).

Among youth who had ever used cannabis:

- 61% used it in the past month (most commonly on 1 or 2 days).
- 15% used it on 20 or more days that month, including 9% who used daily.
- 34% used it on the Saturday before taking the survey.

Youth who had used cannabis were asked about all the ways they had consumed it the last time. Most had smoked it (73%), while 34% vaped it, 23% ate it, and 1% took it another way (such as having a cannabis drink).

Age students first used cannabis (among those who had ever used cannabis)



When asked about their source of cannabis the last time they had used it, the majority reported that it had been shared among a group of friends. Youth in Grade 7 were generally more likely than older ones to report that someone they did not know had given cannabis to them (e.g., 10% vs. 2% of students in Grade 12). Students in Grade 12 were the most likely to have bought it from a cannabis store (e.g., 14% vs. 9% in Grade 10 vs. 3% in Grade 8).

Most recent source of cannabis (among those who had ever used cannabis)	
It was shared among a group of friends	59%
Friend or family member gave it to them	35%
Bought it from friend or family	14%
Bought it from a cannabis store	10%
Bought it from someone they did not know	5%
Someone they did not know gave it to them	3%
Bought it from a website	3%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

An in-depth look at youth cannabis use will be published in early 2025.

Other substances

“I would like to learn more about how to avoid drugs.”

Grade 9 student

Fourteen percent of youth had used substances other than alcohol and cannabis. Compared to 5 years earlier, there were some slight changes in the different substances youth had used. For example, youth were more likely to have used mushrooms (6% vs. 5% in 2018) and more of their own prescription than prescribed (6% vs. 5%). They were less likely to have used ecstasy/MDMA (2% vs. 3% in 2018) and cocaine (just under 2% vs. just over 2% in 2018).

Substances youth had ever used	
Mushrooms	6%
More of their own prescription than prescribed	6%
Prescription pills without a doctor’s consent (other than benzodiazepines)	4%
Hallucinogens (other than mushrooms)	2%
Inhalants	2%
Benzodiazepines without a doctor’s consent (e.g., Xanax, Valium, Ativan)	2%
Cocaine	2%
Ecstasy/MDMA	2%
Heroin, fentanyl, or other opioids	1%
Amphetamines	1%
Crystal meth	1%
Ketamine, GHB	1%

Reported reasons for using substances

“I was allowed my first beer at a family wedding. I only drink at celebrations in a controlled environment.”

Grade 10 student

Youth reported using alcohol and other substances for a variety of reasons. Among youth who used substances, those in lower grades were more likely to have done so to experiment (e.g., 43% in Grade 8 vs. 34% in Grade 10 vs. 26% in Grade 12). Those in higher grades were more likely to have used because their friends were doing it (e.g., 32% in Grade 12 vs. 20% in Grade 7), and to have fun (e.g., 73% in Grade 12 vs. 60% in Grade 10 vs. 41% in Grade 8).

Reasons youth used substances the last time <i>(among those who had used alcohol or other substances)</i>	
Wanted to have fun	61%
Wanted to experiment	32%
Friends were doing it	30%
Because of stress	22%
Felt down or sad	20%
There was nothing else to do	11%
To manage physical pain	6%
Because of an addiction	5%
Thought it would help them focus	5%
Felt pressured into doing it/to fit in	3%
To change the effect of another substance	2%
Didn't mean to (e.g., drink was spiked)	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Consequences of substance use

“We should be taught how to use naloxone on other people and ourselves.”

Grade 11 student

Over half of youth who had used substances in the past 12 months did not report any negative consequences. The most commonly reported consequence was being told they did something they could not remember.

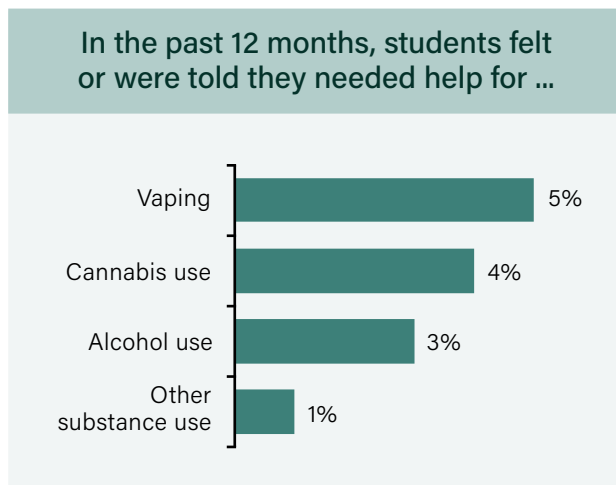
Consequences of substance use experienced in the past 12 months <i>(among youth who had used alcohol or other substances)</i>	
Was told they did something they couldn't remember	29%
Passed out	22%
Got injured	13%
Argued with family members	12%
School work or grades changed	9%
Lost friends or broke up with romantic partner	7%
Damaged property	7%
Had sex when they didn't want to	5%
Got into a physical fight	4%
Got in trouble with police	4%
Overdosed	2%
Had to get medical treatment	2%
Used alcohol or other substances but none of these happened	55%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

A small minority of youth had ever driven a vehicle after using alcohol (2%), cannabis (3%), or other substances (1%). They were more likely to have been a passenger with a driver who had been using alcohol (18%), cannabis (13%), or other substances (4%).

Since the first BC AHS in 1992, youth have been asked whether they used alcohol or substances before having sex the last time. The percentage who reported doing so has fluctuated over the years but has been declining since 2008 (from 32% to 21% in 2023). There were no differences by grade in mixing substance use with sexual activity.

Youth were asked if they felt or had been told that they needed help for their substance use. They were most likely to report needing help for their vaping.



Gender differences in substance use

Males were the least likely to have tried vaping (e.g., 22% vs. 30% of females), smoking (e.g., 13% vs. 16% of females), alcohol (e.g., 35% vs. 41% of females), and cannabis (e.g., 20% vs. 24% of females). Females and non-binary youth used these substances at similar rates to each other.

Rates of using various other substances were generally comparable between males and females, and higher among non-binary youth. For example, 2% of males and females had misused benzodiazepines, compared to 5% of non-binary youth.

Among youth who had used tobacco, alcohol, and/or cannabis, females were the least likely to have done so to excess. For example, among those who used the specific substance in the past month, 2% of females smoked daily (vs. 4% of males vs. 10% of non-binary youth); 1% drank alcohol on 20 or more days (vs. 2% of males vs. 5% of non-binary youth); and 13% used cannabis on 20 or more days (e.g., vs. 18% of males).

There were also some gender differences in the reasons youth used substances. For example, females were the most likely to have used because their friends were doing it (e.g., 34% of females who had used substances vs. 26% of males); and non-binary youth were the most likely to have used because of stress (33% vs. 27% of females vs. 15% of males) and because they felt down or sad (31% vs. 24% of females vs. 14% of males).

Among those who had used substances in the past 12 months, males were generally less likely than females to report various negative consequences of their use. However, they were more likely to have damaged property (9% vs. 6%), and to have gotten into a physical fight (6% vs. 3%). Non-binary youth were the most likely to have had sex when they did not want to (11% vs. 6% of females vs. 4% of males), and to have overdosed (5% vs. 2% of males and females).

Finally, males were the least likely to have felt or been told that they needed help with their substance use, including vaping (e.g., 4% vs. 7% of females); alcohol use (e.g., 2% vs. 4% of females); cannabis use (e.g., 3% vs. 5% of females); and other substance use (e.g., 1% vs. 3% of non-binary youth).

Adverse experiences

Adverse experiences during childhood and adolescence can have lasting negative impacts on health and well-being into adulthood. Such experiences can include abuse, violence, harassment, discrimination, and bereavement.

Abuse

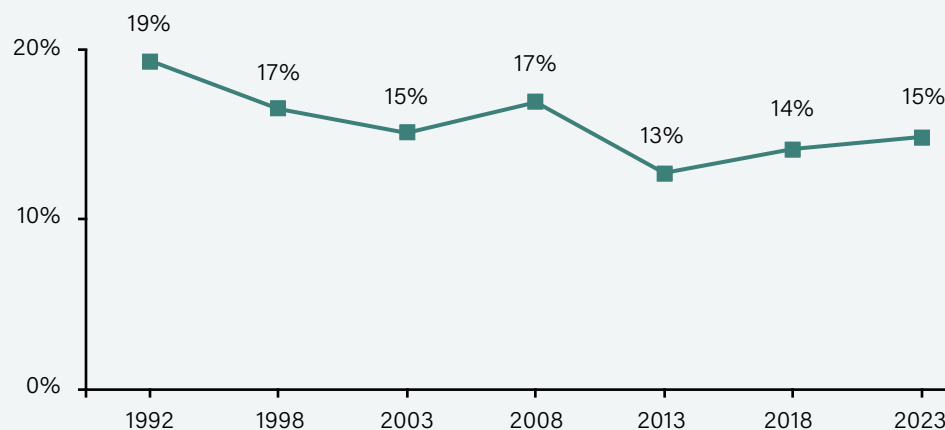
"I was taken away from my mother because of abuse."

Grade 10 student

In their lifetime, 15% of youth had been physically abused. This percentage was higher than in recent years, but was lower than 30 years earlier.

One in 10 youth (10%) reported they had been sexually abused. The percentage who had experienced sexual abuse increased to 13% when experiences of forced sexual activity, and being the younger of an illegal age pairing the first time they had sex, were included. This percentage was higher than in previous years (e.g., 13% vs. 11% in 2018, 9% in 2013, and 10% in 2003).

Changes over time in students who had ever been physically abused



Sexual harassment

"I got sexually harassed at an assembly by a random kid. He kept touching my ass and it made me really uncomfortable. I did not tell anyone about this."

Grade 7 student

During the past 12 months, 40% of youth experienced verbal sexual harassment. This percentage was similar to results over the past decade, and lower than in 2008 (47%) and 2003 (44%).

In the past year, 25% of youth had experienced physical sexual harassment. This reflected an increase over the past decade (from 18% in 2013 and 22% in 2018), but was lower than 20 years earlier (28% in 2003).

Youth in higher grades were more likely than those in lower grades to report they had experienced sexual harassment.

Dating violence

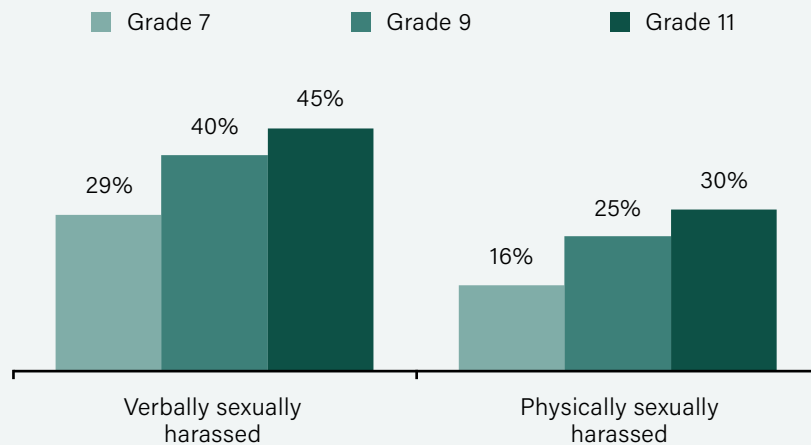
"I want to stop abusing my boyfriend. We've been dating for 2 years. I've given him broken noses and black eyes. I'm a horrible person."

Grade 11 student

Around 4 in 10 youth (42%) had been in a dating relationship in the past 12 months. Among these youth, 8% had experienced physical violence within that relationship. This was the highest rate in 20 years (e.g., 7% in 2018 and 6% in 2013).

In the past year, 13% of youth had experienced digital dating abuse (i.e., someone they dated had used social media to try to control, embarrass, or hurt them).

Students in higher grades were more likely to have been sexually harassed in the past 12 months



Discrimination

“Why are people so racist towards me and other members of the black community?”

Grade 11 student

Over a third of youth (35%) had been discriminated against in at least one place in the past year. They most commonly reported they had been discriminated against at school, followed by online.

Where youth experienced discrimination in the past 12 months	
At school	26%
On social media/online	13%
On the street	7%
In extracurricular activities (e.g., sports)	4%
On public transit	4%
In a store or restaurant	4%
At work	3%
In a hospital or other health care setting	1%
Other	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Compared to 5 years earlier, there was an increase in the percentage of students reporting most forms of discrimination, with the exception of being discriminated against for how much money they or their family had.

Reasons youth reported they had been discriminated against in the past 12 months		
	2018	2023
Physical appearance	22%	24%
Weight	16%	18%
Race, ethnicity, or skin colour	14%	15%
Gender/sex	9%	14%
Sexual orientation	5%	7%
Religion	N/A	7%
How much money they/their family have	8%	6%
Health condition	N/A	4%
Disability	3%	4%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

N/A: The item was not included on the 2018 survey.

The majority of youth who experienced discrimination in the past year had this experience rarely. However, over a third (37%) experienced discrimination more frequently, including 7% who were discriminated against regularly.



Other forms of victimization

"My friend and I have been bullied and harassed online."

Grade 7 student

Rates of youth experiencing in-person victimization at school or on the way to and from school have fluctuated over the past 20 years. Compared to 5 years earlier, youth were less likely to have been socially excluded (37% vs. 39% in 2018) and to have been teased to the point of extreme discomfort (35% vs. 38%) in the past 12 months. The rate of being physically attacked or assaulted remained stable but was higher than in 2013 (8% vs. 7%).

Overall, there was a decrease in youth who reported they had perpetrated one of these forms of victimization at school or on the way to or from school in the past 12 months (8% vs. 10% in 2018).

In addition to in-person victimization, 15% of youth reported they had been cyberbullied (an increase from 14% in 2018), and 8% had perpetrated online victimization (vs. 6% in 2018).

Bereavement

"My grandad died before summer and it changed everything."

Grade 8 student

Most youth (71%) had experienced bereavement. The percentage who had lost someone close to them due to suicide was unchanged from 5 years earlier. However, there was an increase in those who had lost someone to an overdose (8% vs. 5% in 2018) and to violence (4% vs. 3%).

Reasons someone close to them had died

Illness (other than COVID-19)	47%
Old age/natural death	46%
Accident	11%
Suicide	9%
Overdose	8%
COVID-19	6%
Violence	4%
Other	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.



Gender differences in adverse experiences

In general, males were the least likely to have experienced abuse, harassment, and violence; while non-binary youth were the most likely. For example, 6% of males experienced sexual abuse (vs. 19% of females vs. 28% of non-binary youth), and 11% had been physically abused (vs. 18% of females vs. 31% of non-binary youth). However, males were more likely than females to have been physically attacked or assaulted and to have experienced physical violence in their dating relationship.

In the past year, females were the least likely to have perpetrated in-person victimization (6% had teased, excluded, or physically assaulted someone vs. 9% of males vs. 11% of non-binary youth). They were also the least likely to have perpetrated cyberbullying during this time period (e.g., 7% vs. 8% of males).

Gender differences in adverse experiences in the past 12 months			
	Males	Females	Non-binary youth
Verbal sexual harassment	28%	51%	58%
Physical sexual harassment	18%	32%	40%
Physical dating violence [†]	9%	7%	16%
Digital dating abuse [†]	10%	14%	19%
Teased to the point of feeling extreme discomfort	26%	42%	57%
Socially excluded	26%	48%	52%
Physically attacked or assaulted	10%	6%	15%
Cyberbullied	11%	18%	28%

[†]Among youth in a dating relationship in the past 12 months.

School experiences

School connectedness and sense of safety

“School bathrooms can feel very unsafe.”

Grade 9 student

Youth felt less positive about all aspects of their school experience and their relationships with school staff compared to youth in 2018. Some of these decreases represented a continuation of declines seen since 2013. However, the decreases in feeling teachers and other school staff cared about them followed previous increases.

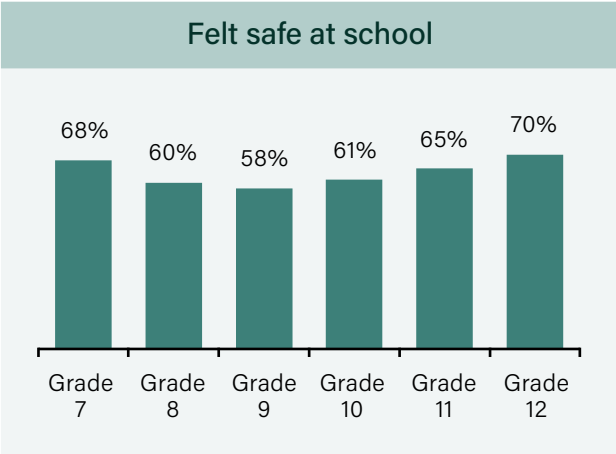
How much youth felt ...					
	2003	2008	2013	2018	2023
School staff expected them to do well	N/A	N/A	N/A	79%	75%
School staff treated them fairly [†]	62%	67%	74%	71%	67%
Safe at school	71%	74%	78%	73%	63%
Teachers cared about them	N/A	N/A	63%	66%	61%
Like a part of their school	58%	65%	62%	60%	54%
Happy to be at school	60%	65%	67%	60%	52%
Other school staff cared about them	N/A	N/A	48%	52%	48%

N/A: The item was not included on the survey.

[†]In 2003 and 2008, youth were asked about teachers treating them fairly; from 2013 onwards, they were asked about school staff treating them fairly.

Feeling connected to school was generally highest for students in Grade 7. For example, Grade 7 students were the most likely to feel like a part of school and to be happy at school. These feelings decreased in Grades 8 and 9, and then generally remained steady for the higher grades.

Feeling teachers cared about them also decreased in the middle grades but increased again among Grade 12 students (e.g., from 72% in Grade 7 to 56% in Grade 9 to 64% in Grade 12). Also, Grade 12 students were the most likely to feel school staff treated them fairly (e.g., 72% vs. 65% of students in Grades 9 and 10). Grade 9 students were generally the least likely to feel safe at school.



Note: Not all changes across grades were statistically significant.

Youth were also asked how safe they felt in specific locations at their school, as well as getting to and from school. They were more likely to feel safe in supervised locations, such as libraries and classrooms, than in less supervised spaces. However, school safety generally declined over the past decade for all locations. For example, in 2023, 68% of youth usually or always felt safe in school washrooms, compared to 86% in 2018.

Grade 12 students were generally the most likely to feel safe in less supervised locations, and Grade 9s were the least likely.

Locations where students usually or always felt safe			
	2013	2018	2023
School library	96%	94%	92%
Classrooms	94%	92%	88%
Getting to and from school	90%	89%	86%
Hallways and stairwells	90%	89%	84%
Cafeteria	91%	90%	84%
Outside on school grounds	87%	86%	82%
Changing rooms	87%	85%	72%
Washrooms	88%	86%	68%

Note: For feeling safe outside on school grounds, the difference between 2013 and 2018 was not statistically significant.



School absences

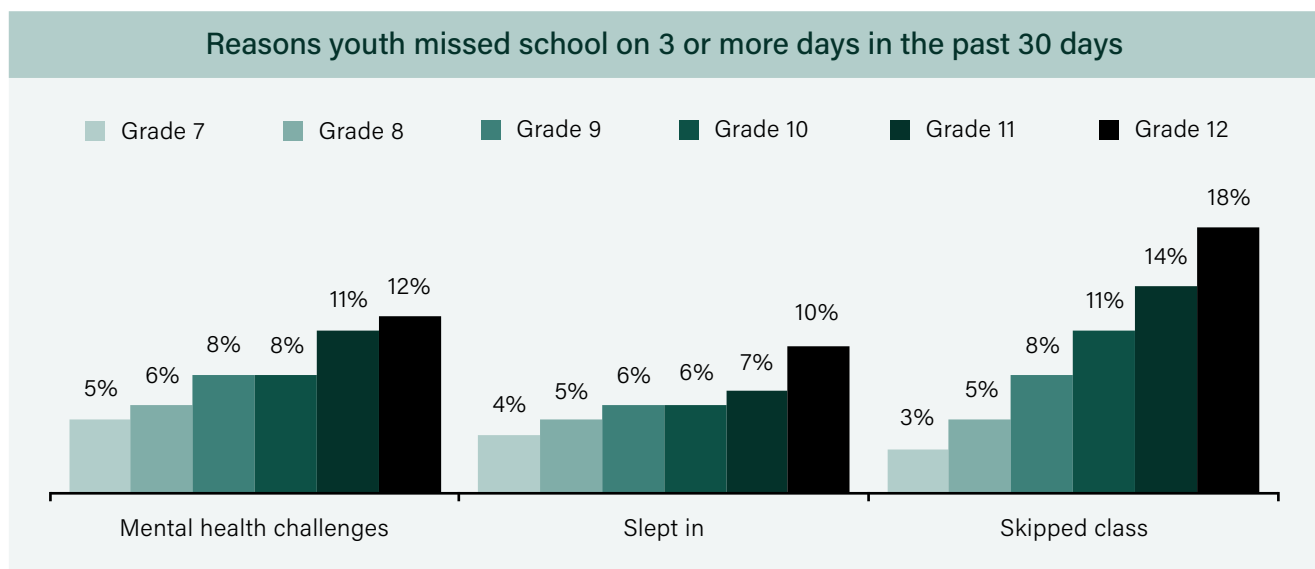
"I get such painful cramps I miss 1 or 2 days of school every month."

Grade 11 student

The most common reasons youth missed school in the past 30 days were because of illness and appointments. More than 1 in 5 missed school due to mental health challenges (vs. 15% in 2018).

The percentage of youth who reported missing school due to skipping, sleeping in, work, transportation, and mental health challenges were highest among those in higher grades, whereas students in lower grades were more likely to have missed school due to bullying or suspension.

Reasons youth missed school in the past 30 days		
	Missed 1 or 2 days	Missed 3 or more days
Illness	31%	17%
Appointments	34%	7%
Skipping	18%	10%
Sleeping in	18%	6%
Own mental health (e.g., anxiety, depression)	13%	8%
Family responsibilities	13%	4%
No transportation	6%	1%
Work	3%	1%
Bullying	3%	1%
Suspension	1%	1%



Note: Not all changes across grades were statistically significant.

Educational plans

*"I want to travel and go to university.
I am ready, I'm just waiting!"*

Grade 10 student

Most youth planned to finish high school and pursue post-secondary education. Students in higher grades were the most likely to plan to attend post-secondary, and the least likely to report they did not plan to finish high school. For example, 85% of Grade 12 students planned to continue their education into post-secondary, compared to 80% of Grade 10 students and 71% of Grade 8 students.

The percentage of youth who planned to attend post-secondary decreased over the past decade from 86% in 2013 to 83% in 2018 to 77% in 2023.

School plans	
Did not expect to finish high school	1%
Planned to finish high school but not go to post-secondary	6%
Planned to go to post-secondary (including university, college, trade school)	77%
Hadn't thought about it	10%
Didn't know	6%

Gender differences in school experiences

Non-binary youth were generally the least likely to have positive school experiences: For example, they were:

- Least likely to feel connected to school, feel safe at school, and plan to go on to post-secondary.
- Most likely to have missed classes on at least 3 days in the past month (e.g., 5% missed this much school due to bullying vs. 1% of females and males).

Why is feeling connected to school important?

School connectedness can contribute to other aspects of well-being. For example, youth who felt like a part of their school were less likely to skip classes (7% skipped on at least 3 days in the past month vs. 20% who did not feel like part of their school), and to bully another youth at school (6% vs. 13%).

Youth who felt like a part of their school were also more likely to rate their mental health as good/excellent (75% vs. 28% who did not feel like part of their school), feel hopeful about their future (74% vs. 33%), and plan to attend post-secondary (83% vs. 64%).

Relationships and connections

Adolescence is a time when young people can learn how to develop and maintain safe and healthy relationships with peers, romantic partners, family members, caregivers, teachers, and adults in the community.

Friendships

"I have a few friends online and in real life."

Grade 9 student

The BC AHS asked youth about how many close friends they had in person (in their school or neighbourhood) as well as those online whom they had never met in person. Compared to 5 years earlier, youth were less likely to have in-person friends (94% vs. 96% in 2018), and more likely to have online friends (36% vs. 34%).

Having three or more in-person friends has been linked to positive outcomes. The percentage of youth who had three or more such friends decreased from 81% in 2018 to 69%. Students in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to have three or more in-person friends (e.g., 74% of Grade 7s vs. 70% of Grade 9s vs. 64% of Grade 12s).

Three quarters (75%) of youth reported they had friends with whom they could share their ups and downs, with older students more likely to have such friends (e.g., 78% of Grade 12s vs. 73% of Grade 7 to 9s).

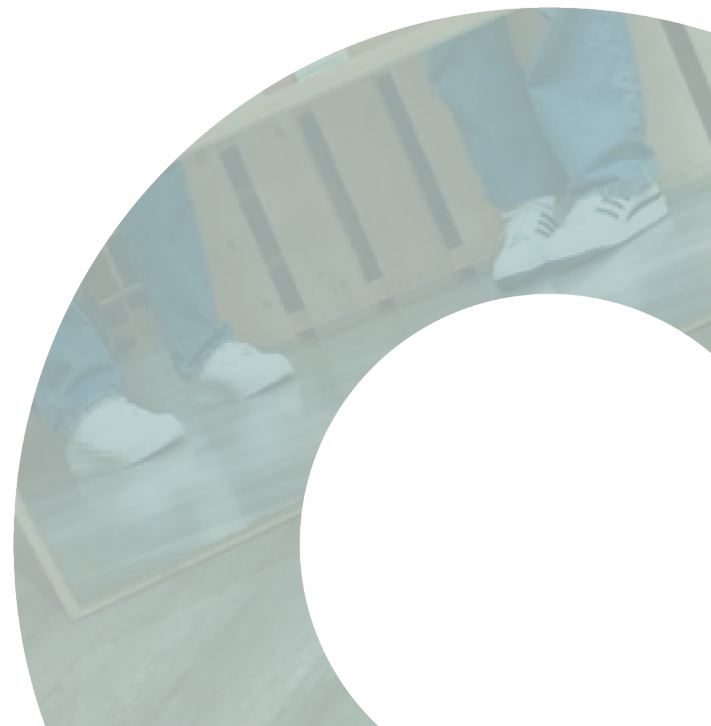
Also, 73% felt they got along with the people around them. Youth in Grades 11 and 12 were the most likely to feel this way (e.g., 77% of Grade 12s vs. 71% of Grade 7 to 9s).

Online dating relationships

"I did start dating my current boyfriend online but we have met in person twice."

Grade 12 student

In the past 12 months, 10% of youth had dated someone online whom they had never met in person, including 3% who had dated two or more people. (See the ***Dating violence*** section for more information about dating relationships.)



Caring and supportive adults

“Where can I find someone to talk to who won’t tell my parents?”

Grade 9 student

Most youth (73%) had at least one adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside of their family and school) who they felt cared about them, and about half (49%) had three or more such adults. Those in Grades 7 and 12 were the most likely to feel adults in their community cared about them. For example, 51% of Grade 7s and 12s had at least three caring adults in their life, compared to 47% of Grade 9 and 10 students.

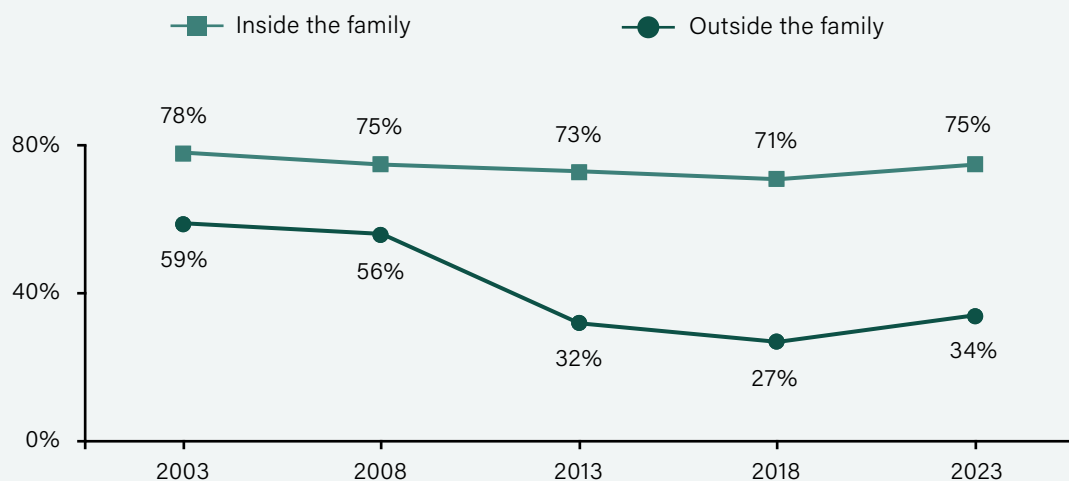
Youth were also asked if they had an adult who they would feel comfortable talking to if they had a serious problem. Three quarters (75%) had an adult inside their family they could talk to, 34% had one outside their family, and 26% had both. These rates were higher than 5 years earlier. Generally, youth in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to have an adult to talk to within their family, whereas those in higher grades were more likely to have an adult outside their family.

Most youth who felt they needed help with specific tasks had an adult who would help them. However, those in the highest grades were the least likely to feel this way. For example, among those who needed help, 84% of students in Grade 12 had an adult to help them prepare for post-secondary, compared to 89% of Grade 9 students.

Had an adult to help with tasks (among those who needed help)

Making/getting to appointments	95%
Learning life skills (e.g., cooking, budgeting)	92%
Preparing for university, college, or trade school	87%
Getting a job	85%
Homework	81%

20-year trend in students having an adult to talk to about a serious problem



Family connectedness

"I live with my amazing father and hard-working step mom."

Grade 10 student

The majority of youth felt connected to their family. Feeling connected decreased with grade level. For example, 65% of Grade 7 students felt quite or very understood by their family, compared to 52% of Grade 9 students and 47% of Grade 12 students.

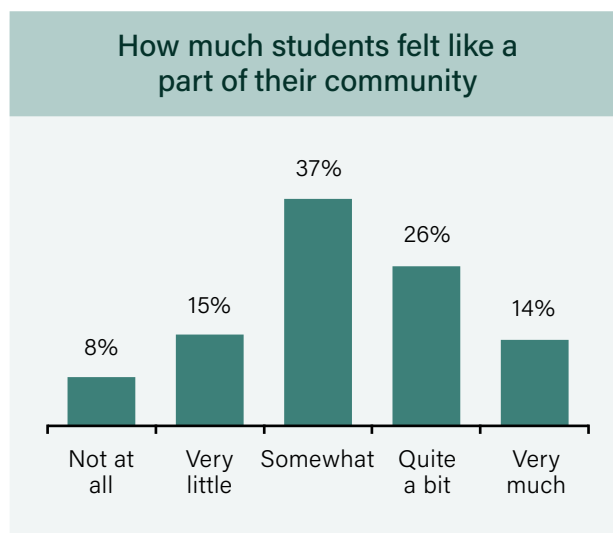
How much youth felt their family ...			
	Not at all/ very little	Somewhat	Quite a bit/ very much
Respected them	9%	18%	73%
Paid attention to them	9%	18%	73%
Had fun together	10%	19%	71%
Understood them	20%	27%	53%

Community connectedness and sense of safety

"I live in a really safe neighbourhood but I take the bus all the time and it terrifies me."

Grade 7 student

Most youth (92%) felt at least a little connected to their community. However, they were less likely than 5 years earlier to feel quite or very connected (40% vs. 42% in 2018). Youth in lower grades were more likely to feel quite or very connected (e.g., 54% of Grade 7s vs. 38% of Grade 9s vs. 34% of Grade 12s).



Most youth often or always felt safe in their neighbourhood during the day (90%) and at night (65%). Younger youth were less likely to feel safe there during the day (e.g., 88% in Grade 7 vs. 92% in Grade 12) and at night (e.g., 61% in Grade 7 vs. 67% in Grade 12).

Among youth who used transit, 54% often or always felt safe doing so (with no grade differences), and around 1 in 6 (17%) rarely or never felt safe on transit.

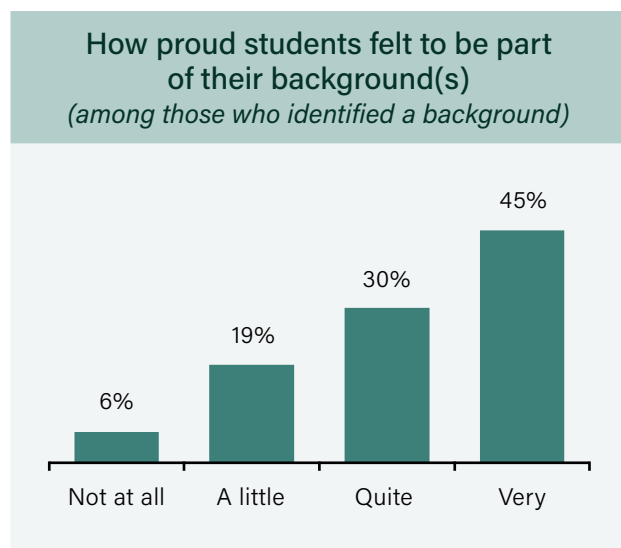
Other types of connectedness

Cultural pride

"I think there should be more opportunities for Indigenous students to learn about our culture."

Grade 11 student

Youth were asked how proud they felt to be part of their background(s). Those in the lower grades were generally more likely to feel proud (e.g., 79% of Grade 7s felt quite or very proud vs. 74% of Grade 10s).



Spirituality

"I am not spiritual but I enjoy philosophy and find meaning in that."

Grade 10 student

Over half of youth (54%) felt that spirituality was at least a little important to them, including 14% for whom it was very important. Older youth were more likely to identify spirituality as important to them. For example, 60% of Grade 12 students felt this way (vs. 49% of Grade 7s and 8s).

Connection to the land and nature

"I wish there was more nature involved in school."

Grade 10 student

The majority of youth felt connected to the land and nature at least sometimes (62%), including 6% who always felt this way. Grade 7 students were the most likely to feel connected at least sometimes (67%), and the rate dropped to 59% among Grade 9s, before increasing again for Grade 12 students (64%).



Time to do the things they want

"I would like to learn more about time management because I feel like I don't have enough time in the day to do activities with friends and family."

Grade 9 student

Youth generally felt they spent the right amount of time with family, friends, on their own, and in nature. They were more likely than students in 2018 to indicate they spent the right amount of time with their family (75% vs. 73% in 2018) and friends (69% vs. 68%). The percentages who felt they had the right amount of time on their own and in nature were unchanged from 5 years earlier.

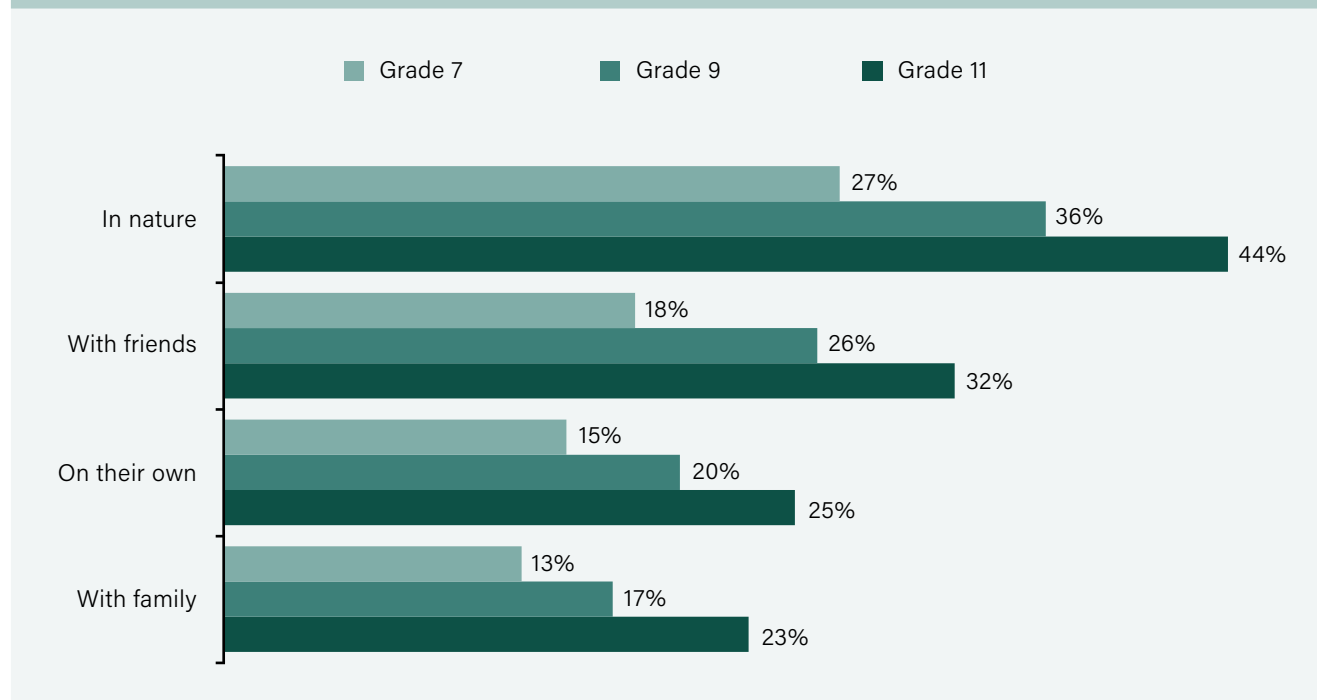
Youth in lower grades were more likely than those in higher grades to feel they spent the right amount of time in these areas, while older youth were more likely to feel they had insufficient time.

How much time youth felt they had to do what they wanted ...

	Not enough	Right amount	Too much
With family	19%	75%	6%
With friends	26%	69%	5%
On their own	20%	67%	13%
In nature	38%	59%	4%

Note: Percentages for time in nature do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Students who felt they did not spend enough time ...



Gender differences in relationships and connections

There were some gender differences in youth's relationships and connections. For example:

- Males were the most likely to have in-person friends, have a supportive adult in their family, to feel like a part of their community, and to feel safe in their neighbourhood and on transit (e.g., 66% of males who used transit often or always felt safe doing so vs. 43% of females vs. 37% of non-binary youth).
- Females were the most likely to feel they had an adult in their community who cared about them, that spirituality was important to them, and connected to the land or to nature (e.g., 66% felt connected to nature at least sometimes vs. 58% of males).
- Non-binary students were the most likely to have online friends, and to have dated someone online (e.g., 16% dated someone they had not met in person vs. 10% of females).

Why are connections important?

Having positive and supportive connections to peers, family, and community promotes youth's health and well-being. For example, youth who felt they had an adult in their neighbourhood who cared about them were more likely to feel quite or very hopeful about their future (63% vs. 48% of those who did not feel an adult cared). Also, those who had three or more close in-person friends were more likely to feel safe at school (68% felt safe vs. 53% of those with one friend vs. 48% without an in-person friend).

Other types of connections were also important. Youth who felt quite or very proud of their background were more likely to feel they had a good life (79% vs. 68% who felt a little/no pride), feel good about themselves (57% vs. 38%), and to rate their mental health as good or excellent (65% vs. 46%). Youth who often or always felt connected to the land or nature were more likely to feel they managed their stress well or very well (55% vs. 44% of those who never or hardly ever felt connected).



Recreational activities

Participation in formal and informal recreational activities can help young people to not only relax and build connections with peers who have similar interests, but also to identify their skills and interests, and develop their autonomy.

Swimming ability

“Don’t ask [people from my background] if we can swim because we can’t.”

Grade 11 student

Swimming can be a recreational activity, a competitive sport, and a potential life-saving skill. It is a mandatory part of the school curriculum in many countries, and there are calls for Canada to also make it part of the curriculum.

For the first time, the BC AHS asked about youth's swimming ability. Overall, 62% of youth reported they were a confident swimmer, 29% could swim but not confidently, and 9% could not swim at all.

Youth at each grade level reported similar swimming abilities. For example, they were as likely to report they could not swim in Grade 12 as they were in Grade 7.

Extracurricular physical activity

“Can we have nets on our soccer goals? There are no nets and I love playing to get my mind off things.”

Grade 12 student

Youth were asked about their participation in various types of extracurricular physical activity over the past 12 months, including whether they did these activities at least weekly.

Participated in sports and exercise at least weekly in the past 12 months

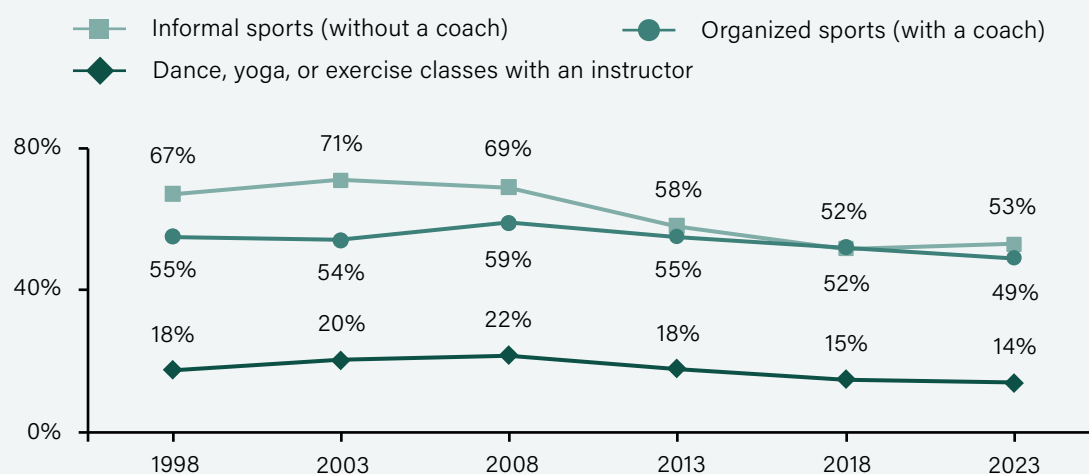
Informal sports (without a coach)	53%
Organized sports (with a coach)	49%
Exercise at a gym or rec centre	36%
Dance, yoga, or exercise classes with an instructor	14%
Extreme sports (e.g., backcountry skiing, BMX)	12%
Exercise to an online video or online class	12%



Compared to previous survey years, students were less likely to participate in organized sports and in dance, yoga, or exercise classes on a weekly basis. However, they were slightly more likely than 5 years earlier to play informal sports weekly and more likely than 5 and 10 years earlier to engage in extreme sports (12% did so weekly vs. 9% in 2018 and 11% in 2013).

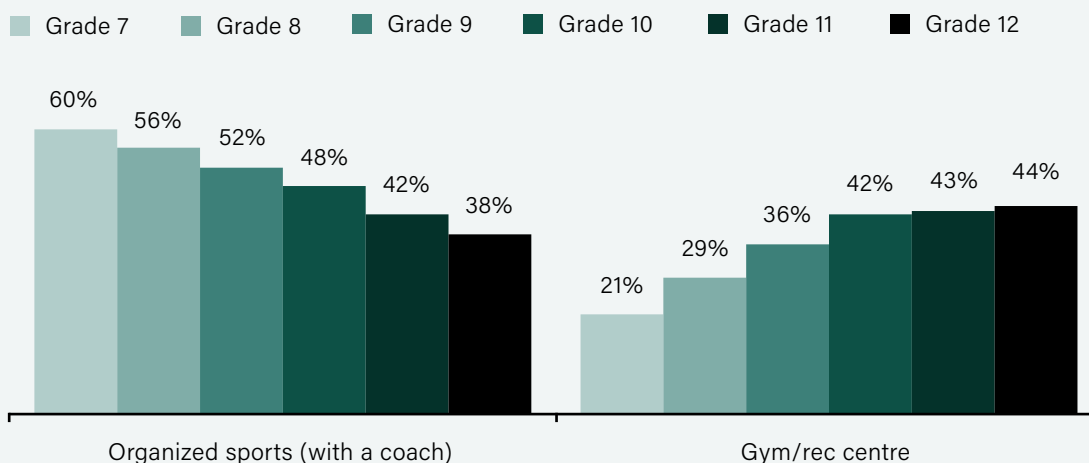
Youth in lower grades were generally more likely than those in higher grades to participate weekly in extracurricular physical activity. However, students in higher grades were more likely to be exercising at a gym or rec centre.

Changes over time in at least weekly participation in sports and exercise



Note: For organized sports, the differences between 1998, 2003, and 2013 were not statistically significant.

Students in higher grades were less likely to participate weekly in organized sports and more likely to exercise at a gym/rec centre



Note: For gym/rec centre, the differences between Grades 10–12 were not statistically significant.

Barriers to engaging in extracurricular physical activity

"I broke my wrist 10 days ago which is stopping me playing sports."

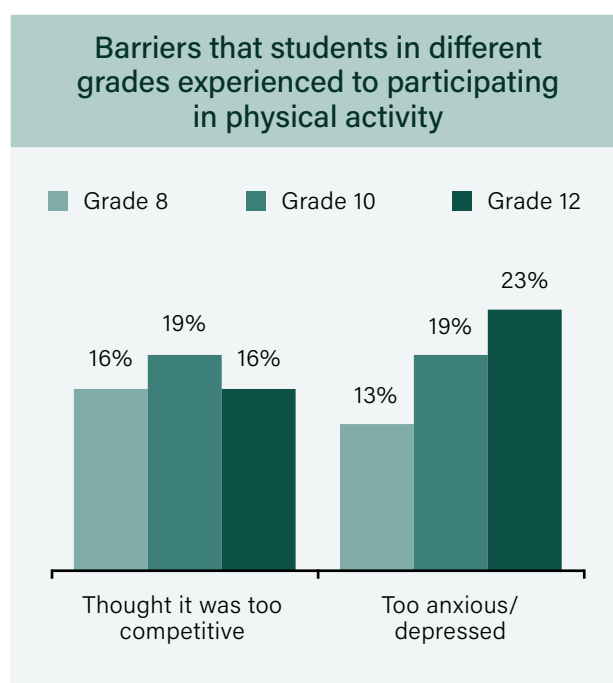
Grade 7 student

Just under two thirds of youth (64%) reported that they experienced barriers to engaging in extracurricular physical activity. The most common barrier was being too busy. However, more than 1 in 5 did not participate because they were injured. Also, around 1 in 6 did not participate because they were too anxious or depressed, or were worried about it being too competitive.

Barriers youth experienced to participating in physical activity	
Too busy	40%
Was injured	22%
Too anxious/depressed	17%
Thought it was too competitive	17%
Worried about being bullied by another youth	12%
Couldn't get there or get home	12%
Didn't feel welcome	10%
Couldn't afford it	9%
Activity wasn't available in their community	8%
Parent/guardian would not allow them to	7%
Worried about catching something (e.g., COVID-19)	6%
Worried about being bullied by an adult	5%
Health needs/disability could not be accommodated	2%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Students in higher grades were more likely to report they did not participate because they were too busy, couldn't afford it, and because they were too anxious or depressed. Those in the middle grades were generally the most likely to not participate because they were worried it would be too competitive.



Gender differences in physical activity

Overall, males were the most likely to engage in regular physical activity and the least likely to experience barriers to participation. For example, males were the most likely to engage in weekly organized sports, extreme sports, and informal sports. Also, 45% exercised at a gym or rec centre at least weekly (vs. 29% of females vs. 14% of non-binary youth).

Females were the most likely to engage in dance, yoga, and exercise classes (21% vs. 13% of non-binary youth vs. 7% of males), and to exercise to an online video (17% vs. 11% of non-binary youth vs. 8% of males).

Non-binary youth were the most likely to report they could not swim (e.g., 11% vs. 8% of males).

Why is physical activity important?

Youth who take part in physical activity on a regular basis are more likely to report positive health and well-being. For example, students who participated in informal sports at least weekly were more likely than those who took part less often to report good or excellent overall health (79% vs. 66%) and mental health (65% vs. 53%), and to feel good about themselves (58% vs. 45%).

Also, youth were more likely to get 8 or more hours of sleep if they participated in regular physical activity, including weekly organized sports (48% vs. 35% who took part less often), extreme sports (49% vs. 40%), and informal sports (45% vs. 37%).

Cultural and volunteer activities

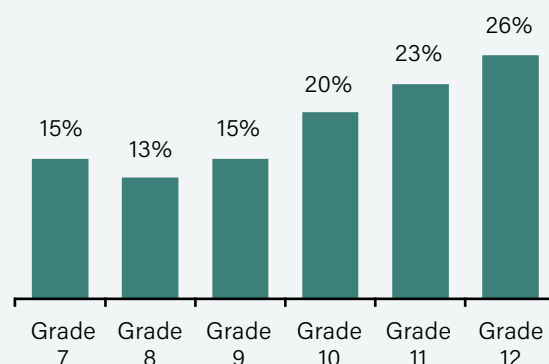
"I video game too much and I need more stuff like volunteer opportunities to do."

Grade 9 student

In the past year, 46% of youth had taken part in cultural or traditional activities, including 13% who participated at least weekly. Females were the most likely to participate on a weekly basis (e.g., 15% vs. 11% of males), as were younger students in comparison to older ones (e.g., 17% in Grade 7 vs. 11% in Grade 12).

Around half of students (51%) had volunteered without pay in the past year, including 19% who volunteered at least once a week (e.g., 23% of females vs. 15% of males). Volunteering on a weekly basis was more common among students in higher grades.

Students in higher grades were more likely to volunteer on a weekly basis



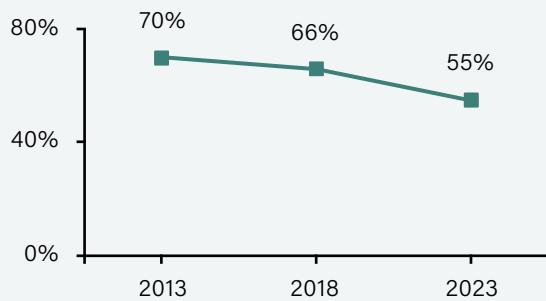
Connection to activities

"I feel good health comes from a group of people you can connect with. There should be more youth groups and activities to connect students together."

Grade 10 student

Most youth felt the activities they engaged in were at least somewhat meaningful to them, including 55% who felt their activities were quite or very meaningful. However, this percentage was lower than in previous survey years, as was the percentage who felt their ideas were listened to and valued within their activities (35% felt their ideas were listened to and valued quite a bit/a lot vs. 44% in both 2013 and 2018).

Decrease over time in students who felt their activities were quite/very meaningful to them



Why is engagement in community activities important?

Engagement in the community can help youth to feel connected and supported, and can contribute to positive well-being. For example, youth who were involved in their community through weekly volunteering were more likely to feel connected to their community (49% vs. 37% who did not volunteer this regularly), and to feel that an adult in their community really cared about them (80% vs. 72%).

Similarly, youth who took part in cultural or traditional activities on a weekly basis were more likely to feel connected to their community (54% vs. 38% who took part less often or not at all), as well as proud of their culture (91% vs. 73%) and good about themselves (56% vs. 51%).



Gambling

"For the sports betting, it's fantasy drafts that I do with no direct money involved."

Grade 12 student

Gambling is one recreational activity that has looked different over time. For example, the 2003 BC AHS contained questions about bingo, slot machines, and sports lottery tickets, as these games were popular among the province's youth. Twenty years later, online games have become the most common way that youth gamble for money.

Ways that youth gambled for money in the past 12 months

Bought in-game items (e.g., loot boxes)	20%
Played cards/dice in person	11%
Played in a gaming tournament	9%
Bought lottery tickets/scratch cards	7%
Streamed video games (e.g., Twitch)	7%
Sports betting in person	6%
Played cards/dice online	5%
Sports betting online	4%

Gambling for things other than money can sometimes lead to gambling for money. In the past 12 months, 13% of youth gambled for something of value other than money, and 34% gambled 'just for fun.'

Youth were also asked whether they had bet with virtual credits within the past 30 days. Around a third (31%) did not play video games at all during this time, and 50% did not bet with virtual credits. However, 8% bet with virtual credits they purchased using real money, 13% bet with virtual credits they had won or earned in a video game, and 6% had bet for prizes.

In response to a question about addiction, 1% of youth felt or had been told that their gambling had reached a point where they needed help, and 12% were at this point with their video gaming.

An in-depth look at the gambling behaviours of BC youth will be published in 2025.

Phone use

“At home I have nobody to play with so I go on my phone so much that I get a headache.”

Grade 7 student

Most youth (97%) had a phone or tablet (e.g., 92% of students in Grade 7 vs. 98% in Grade 9 vs. 99% in Grade 11). They most commonly used a phone for scrolling through social media, followed by connecting with family and friends.

Around 1 in 6 youth (18%) felt or had been told that their social media use had reached a point where they needed help.

What youth used a phone/tablet for on their last school day

Scrolling through social media	74%
Connecting with family and friends	65%
Gaming other than esports	26%
Playing/watching esports	18%
Watching porn	5%
Sexting	2%
Gambling	2%
None of these	11%

Compared to 2018, there was a decrease in the percentage of youth who used a phone on their last school day to watch pornography (from 12% to 5%) and for sexting (from 5% to 2%).

There were some grade and gender differences in what youth used their phone for on their most recent school day. For example, students in higher grades were more likely to use their phone for connecting with family and friends (73% in Grade 11 vs. 64% in Grade 9 vs. 47% in Grade 7); scrolling through social media (84% in Grade 11 vs. 77% in Grade 9 vs. 48% in Grade 7); watching pornography (7% in Grade 11 vs. 5% in Grade 9 vs. 2% in Grade 7); and gambling (4% in Grade 11 vs. 2% in Grade 9 vs. 1% in Grade 7).

Females were the most likely to have used their phone for connecting with family and friends (e.g., 73% vs. 57% of males) and for scrolling through social media (79% vs. 73% of non-binary youth vs. 69% of males). Males were the most likely to have used their phone for playing/watching esports (28% vs. 11% of non-binary youth vs. 7% of females) and for gaming other than esports (37% vs. 32% of non-binary youth vs. 14% of females). Non-binary youth were the most likely to have used their phone for watching pornography (11% vs. 8% of males vs. 2% of females) and for sexting (5% vs. 3% of males vs. 2% of females).



Next steps and resources

The results presented in this report provide an introductory overview of the 2023 BC AHS data. It is hoped that parents, policy makers, practitioners, and young people themselves will use the results to celebrate what is going well for youth in BC, and to drive positive change where progress has stalled, or where well-being has declined. We hope the resources listed below may be helpful in supporting those conversations.

To join our community mailing list; request a presentation or workshop; and for further details about all the resources listed here, please email mccreary@mcs.bc.ca.

2023 BC AHS dissemination materials

For the latest reports, fact sheets, infographics, and other resources to be produced from the 2023 BC AHS, please visit mcs.bc.ca/ahs.

A music video created by a group of young hip hop artists in Vancouver shares some of the comments provided by participants in the 2023 BC AHS, and is available at youtube.com/user/McCrearyCentre.

Accessing the BC AHS data

Researchers from academic institutions and other partner agencies are encouraged to contact mccreary@mcs.bc.ca if they would like to apply to access the data, or to commission McCreary to conduct additional research projects with the data.

Engaging youth in the 2023 BC AHS results

Next Steps workshops

The Next Steps is an award-winning workshop series that supports youth to engage with the BC AHS data. A toolkit will be available shortly that provides facilitators (e.g., teachers, Public Health Nurses, youth workers, and other adult supports) with a workshop template that can be used to share results of the survey with youth aged 12 to 19. It includes an introduction to the results, interactive activities to learn about risk and protective factors, and discussion questions to explore local youth health issues. The toolkit will be available at mcs.bc.ca/next_steps.

Research Slam

The Research Slam program is a fast-paced weekend or week-long program which teaches youth basic community-based research skills, including ways to answer their research questions using BC AHS data.

Youth Action Grants (YAGs)

The YAG program is facilitated by McCreary's Youth Advisory and Action Council. YAG's offer up to \$750 for youth-led projects that address findings from the BC AHS and that seek to support or improve youth health. For more information on how youth can apply, please visit mcs.bc.ca/youth_action_grants.

Youth Health Ambassadors (YHA)

The YHA are a team of school-aged youth across BC who facilitate conversations with their peers about youth health topics, and support the sharing of the BC AHS data.

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Langara College
North Island College
University of British
Columbia Okanagan
University of the Fraser
Valley
University of Victoria
Vancouver Community
College

