

## **ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY: Province of British Columbia**

*The first part of this survey was published in PRO-TEEN 4.3, September 1995.*

The McCreary Center Society undertook the development of this survey in 1990 because relatively little information was available on the health status and health practices of adolescents in the province.

### **1. Survey Method**

In 1992, the Society, in conjunction with the provincial Health Units, conducted a health status and risk behaviour survey of student from Grade 7 through 12 enrolled in public and independent schools in B.C. Students from 48 different school districts participated. This survey involving 15,549 participants represents the largest and most comprehensive survey to date of the health status and health risks of B.C. youth.

This survey has the capacity to inform communities of the conditions and circumstances which appear to exacerbate youth health problems, as well as those which appear to serve as protective factors for youth.

#### **1.1 The Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was administered to students in classroom settings. It contained 123 questions for which the students were asked to choose an answer from a list of pre-formulated options.

#### **1.2 Sample**

For each school district in the province, a 10% sample of students was drawn by randomly selecting schools and classrooms representing Grades 7 through 12 in public and independent schools. The instructions given to students were standardized across administrations in all grades and schools.

Approximately 6.1% of the estimated 256,884 Grade 7 to 12 students in the province actually participated in the survey. This amounts to 15,549 student participants or roughly 2,592 students per grade level. The overall response rate was 74%.

Approximately 1% of the survey records were deleted.

### **2. Student and family characteristics**

The quality of home and family life can have profound consequences on the development and well-being of adolescents.

#### **2.1 Origins and Ethnicity**

- 84% were born in Canada and 80% indicate they have lived in Canada all their lives.
- Overall, about 56% of all students claim one ethnic group identity, 27% claim two ethnic identities and 16% claim they have no ethnic group affiliation.

## 2.2 Mobility and Living Arrangements

- 64% have lived at their current address more than 3 years; 16% have been at their current address less than a year.
- 71% live with both parents; 23% live with one parent; 6% have other living arrangements.

## 2.3 Parents' Marital Status, Employment and Education

- 68% have parents presently married; 23% have parents separated or divorced.
- 23% did not know about their father's education.
- 18% did not know about their mother's education.
- 19% of fathers did not finish high school.
- 17% of fathers and 24% of mothers have a high school education; 42% of fathers and 41% of mothers have post secondary education.
- 12% of fathers and 11% of mothers are currently unemployed or seasonally employed.

## 2.4 Part-time Work and Spending Money

- 44% of all students are employed (46% of males and 42% of females)
- Most students employed (56% of males and 58% of females) are working 9 hours or less per week; 14% of working males and 8% of working females are employed more than 20 hours per week.
- 7% of males and 5% of females in grade 7 have more than \$50 in spending money per week.
- The comparable proportion in grade 12 is 37% for males and 22% for females.

## 2.5 Religiosity

- 37% indicate they are not at all religious (41% of males, 32% of females); 17% of males and 20% of females view themselves as religious.

## **3. Academic Performance**

### 3.1 Performance at School

- 62% rate their performance at school as above average; 27% as just average; 11% as below average.

### 3.2 Feelings About School

- 79% indicate they like school to some degree; 21% of students say they either don't like or hate school.
- Male and female express a similar range of feelings about school, but more males than females at all grade levels say they don't like it or hate it (24% vs 18%).

### 3.3 Expectations for Completing Education

- 19% plan to attend a college or technical school; 58% plan to be university graduated (declines as grade level increases).
- The proportion of female students who expect to graduate from university is higher than that of male students (63% vs 53%).
- Only 8% expect to either not finish high school or just complete high school. Slightly higher among males (10% vs 6%).
- 16% do not have expectations for completing their education or have expectations which do not include college, technical or university training.

### 3.4 School Avoidance

- Among grade 7 students, 17% of males and 14% of females had skipped classes one or more times in the previous 4 weeks.
- Among grade 12 students, the proportion rises to 54% and 50% respectively.

### 3.5 Correlates of School Performance & Expectations

A number of student attributes are positively associated with school performance. For example, of all students who assessed their performance as above average, 60% have a father with a post-secondary education. By comparison, of all students who assessed their performance as below average, 38% have a father with a post-secondary education.

A number of student attributes are negatively associated with school performance. For example, 55% of students who assessed their performance in school as below average consumed alcohol in the past month, as compared to 35% of above average students.

A very similar pattern emerges, as these attributes also distinguish students who plan only a secondary or high school education from those who plan to pursue post-secondary studies.

## **4. Physical Health and Well-Being**

### 4.1 Self-Perceptions of Health

- 86% rate their health as either excellent or good; 14% rate it as just fair or poor.
- 43% of male students rate their health as excellent compared to 25% of female students.
- Conversely, 18% of females rate their health as just fair or poor, but only 11% of males do the same.
- Females in grade 9 and males in grade 8 are the groups most likely to rate their health as only fair or poor.

### 4.2 Health Troubles and Problems

- Significant percentages of students report having problems with their health or appearance (acne being the most prevalent).
- Generally, female students are more likely to report problems than are male students.
- Approximately 24% of students report not having or having had any health problems.
- 25% report only one; 19% report just two; 33% report 3 or more.

- Allergies, emotional problems, stomach problems and asthma are the most prevalent conditions experienced by students.
- The percentage of students of both sexes who are limited in their normal activities, appears to rise slightly between grades 7 and 9 before levelling out across grades 10 to 12.

#### 4.3 Correlates of Health Status

- A number of student attributes are positively associated with health status. For example, of all students who rate their health as excellent/good, 65% perceive themselves to be above average at school. By comparison, of those who rate their health as fair/poor, 46% perceive themselves to be above average at school.

Conversely, a number of student attributes are negatively associated with self-rated health status. For example, 33% of students who rate their health as fair/poor have tried marijuana, as compared to 23% of students who rate their health as excellent/good.

Students' self-assessed health status is associated with a number of health-enhancing and health-compromising behaviours, as well as several indicators of well-being.

#### 4.4 Weight Control and Management

- 33% desire a gain in body weight; 11% desire no change; 56% desire a loss in body weight.
- Most female students indicate a desire to lose weight (77% overall) and the percentage increases with grade level (from 69% in grade 7 to 82% in grade 12).
- Conversely, male students are much more likely to desire a gain in weight (55% overall) and this percentage increases with grade level (from 40% in grade 7 to 66% in grade 12).
- 35% indicated they are presently trying to lose weight; 18% indicated they are presently trying to gain weight; 15% indicated they are presently trying to maintain their current weight.
- Females are most likely to say they are presently trying to lose weight (53% overall) and this percentage rises with grade level (from 42% in grade 7 to 59% in grade 12).
- Males are most likely to say they are presently trying to gain weight (31% overall) and this percentage rises with grade level (from 18% in grade 7 to 41% in grade 12).
- Male students are more likely than females to use only exercise to control their weight, while females are somewhat more likely than males to use only dieting.
- However, a healthy combination of exercise and dieting is more prevalent among females (30%) than males (11%).
- Unhealthy weight control practices in the 7 days preceding the survey (purging after meals, diet pills etc.) were acknowledged by 6% of the male students and 7% of the female students who are trying to lose or maintain the same weight.
- 44% of females and 24% of males admit to bingeing at least once in a while.
- The percentage of male students who binge eat tends to decline somewhat as grade level increases, but for female students the percentage rises quickly as they enter high school and then levels off.
- Purging was acknowledged by 4% of males and 8% of females.
- The prevalence of purging declines slightly as grade level increases for males, but increases somewhat for females.
- Report of steroid use are quite rare (3% of males and 1% of female s)

#### 4.5 Correlates in Body Image

Students who see themselves as overweight are less likely to feel they are in excellent/good health, and more likely to be not at all satisfied with their present weight, to binge eat and purge after meals. They are also more likely to eat a low fat diet, but slightly less likely to eat a high fiber diet or to be a member of a school or community sportsteam. On the other hand, students who see themselves as underweight are somewhat more likely to be not at all satisfied with their present weight and somewhat less likely to eat a low fat diet.

#### 4.6 Desired Change in Body Weight

Generally the desired changes in body weight are consistent with the students' self-reported Body Mass Index category. Nevertheless, not all of the desired changes in body weight appear to be well-founded.

#### 4.7 Nutritional Practices

- 25% of males and 21% of females have a diet high in fiber, while 87% of females and 74% of males have a diet low in fat.
- The proportion of male and female students with high fiber diets is fairly constant across all grade levels.
- On the other hand, the proportion of both males and females with low fat diets tends to decline as grade level increases.

#### 4.8 Exercise, Physical Education Classes and Sports

- 68% of all students report exercising at least 3 or more days in the past week; however, more males than females report exercising this regularly (76% vs 61%).
- The proportion of both male and female who exercised regularly in the past week actually declines steadily between grades 8 and 12, especially for females.
- Female students are somewhat more likely than male students to report not taking part in any P.E. classes (30% vs 24%).
- For both males and females the frequency of taking 3 or more P.E. classes each week rises steeply between grades 7 and 8 and then begins to fall dramatically, especially in grades 11 and 12.
- Overall, 50% of males and 40% of females report being on a school team.
- 52% of males and 33% of females report being a member of a community sportsteam.

#### 4.9 Preventive Dental Practices

Fortunately, only 1% of all students report brushing rarely or never, but 8% report brushing less than daily. These combined rates are highest among males and females in grade 7 (18% and 10% respectively) and the n decrease steadily for both sexes as grade level increases.

- Nearly three-quarters of students report brushing their teeth once or twice each day, and just 17% report brushing 3 or more times each day (12% of males and 22% of females).

## **5. Injury-related risks**

### **5.1 Motor Vehicle-Related Risks**

- Approximately 27% of male students and 20% of female students in the province indicated they are licensed drivers.
- Male drivers are more likely than female drivers to report ever having driven a vehicle after drinking alcohol (37% vs 27%).
- Approximately 19% of all students in the province report riding in a vehicle with a drinking driver at least once in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. This percentage is about the same for male and female students, but for both sexes it increases substantially with grade level.
- Only 57% of males and 59% of females report "always" wearing a seatbelt. The percentage of students who always wear a seatbelt declines between Grades 7 and 8, is lowest among students in Grades 8 to 10 and then rises again in Grades 11 and 12.
- Even though helmet use by motorcyclists is mandatory in B.C., 56% of males and 64% of females indicated they always wear a helmet when riding on a motorcycle. Also, 17% of male and 18% of female motorcycle riders report never wearing a helmet. Helmet use is highest among students of both sexes in Grade 7, but then declines steadily through to Grade 12.

### **5.2 Correlates of Motor Vehicle-Related Risks**

A number of student attributes are positively associated with drinking and driving. For example, of all licensed drivers who report drinking and driving one or more times in the past 30 days, 17% perceive themselves to be below average at school as compared to 9% of drivers who indicated they had not been driving after drinking in the past 30 days.

### **5.3 Unsupervised Swimming**

- Approximately 86% of male and female indicated they had been swimming one or more times in the year preceding the survey.
- Overall 44% of swimmers report having a lifeguard or adult present most or all the time. Females fare somewhat better than males in having a lifeguard present this frequently (47% vs 41%). However, grade level appears to be more important, as the presence of a lifeguard most or all the time is highest among male and female students in Grade 7 (59% and 69% respectively).

## **6. Violence and Weapon-carrying**

### **6.1 Weapon-Carrying**

- 84% of all students report not carrying any kind of weapon in the 30 days preceding the survey.

- 27% of males and 5% of females did report carrying a weapon on one or more days in the preceding month. 11% of all males said they carried a weapon on 6 or more days.
- Knives and razors were the common weapons identified by both males (59%) and females (79%) who carried weapons. About 22% of males and 9% of females who had carried weapons in the past month indicated they carried a handgun or rifle most often.
- These reports could well represent days in which these students went hunting in the woods, rather than days in which they were attending school. Nevertheless, the accessibility of weapons, as well as the apparent need of some students to carry potentially lethal weapons, is disturbing.

### 6.2 *Fighting and Physical Violence*

- Approximately two-thirds of all students report not being involved in a physical fight in the year preceding the survey. The absence of physical fighting was more characteristic of females than males (79% vs 55%).
- 45% of male students and 21% of female students report having one or more physical fights in the past year. Most of these youth report having had only one to three fights, yet there is at least 5% of the male and 2% of the female student population who had ten or more fights.
- Physical fighting is highest among males in Grades 7 and 8 and among females in Grades 8 and 9 but diminishes somewhat for both sexes in the senior years of high school.
- Among males who had physical fights in the past year, 48% reported last fighting with a friend, 19% with a stranger, 9% with a family member and 1% fought with a girlfriend or date.
- Among females, 45% reported last fighting with a family member, 31% with a friend, 6% with a boyfriend or date and 4% fought with a stranger.
- Among those students in the province who had physical fights in the past year, 14% of the males and 8% of the females indicated they sustained injuries which required medical treatment while fighting.

### 6.3 *Correlates of Weapon-Carrying & Physical Violence*

A number of student attributes are positively associated with weapon-carrying. For example, of students who report carrying a weapon on one or more days in the past month, 36% said they either do not like school or hate it, as compared to 18% of all students who report not carrying a weapon.

An even larger number of student attributes are positively associated with physical violence. For example, of all students who admit to one or more fights in the past year, 45% skipped school in the past month as compared to 29% of all students who report zero physical fights in the past year.

These figures suggest that violence and weapon carrying by students in B.C. are closely associated with other types of risk-taking behaviour and health risk factors.

## **7. Emotional Health**

Emotional health is integral to how well one carries out day-to-day activities and how well one functions in school, social and family settings.

### **7.1 Poor Well-Being and Emotional Distress**

While the majority of students in B.C. report favourable levels of well-being in the past month, about one-quarter indicated they usually felt bored and two-thirds said they do not usually feel rested after sleep. On the other hand, just 3% of students indicated they were always or often in a bad mood during the month preceding the survey. Male students fare slightly better than female students when it comes to these three indicators of poor well-being. Approximately 5% of male students and 11% of female students in the province indicated they were emotionally distressed in the month preceding the survey. Rates of emotional distress are substantially higher among females than males at nearly all grade levels. Among females, the rates rise steadily from Grade 7 through to Grades 11 and 12, but among males the rates increase between Grades 7 and 8 and then level off for Grades 9 through 12.

### **7.2 Correlates of Emotional Distress**

A number of student attributes are negatively associated with emotional distress. For example, of all students who were not emotionally distressed in the preceding month, 87% rated their health as either good or excellent as compared to 68% of all students who were emotionally distressed in the month preceding the survey.

Conversely, a number of student attributes are positively associated with emotional distress. For example, 57% of students who were emotionally distressed drank alcohol in the past 30 days, as compared to 39% of students who were not emotionally distressed.

The high rates of low self-esteem, suicidal ideations and a history of abuse among the emotionally distressed appear particularly noteworthy.

### **7.3 Suicide Experiences**

There has been a steady increase in suicide among youth in Canada over the last 25 years. It is now among the leading causes of death in adolescents. Although much has been written about suicide experiences, little is known about patterns and trends in the general youth population.

Among all students in the province, 16% had considered suicide at least once in the preceding year, 14% had gone one step further and planned a suicide, 7% indicated they had actually attempted a suicide and 2% report being injured in a suicide attempt.

It is only this last group which is likely to come to the attention of our health services each year, yet eight times this number of students report having some personal experience with suicide.

At all grade levels, more females than males acknowledge considering suicide one or more times. For females, the percentage rises between Grades 7 and 11 and then declines again among students



in Grade 12. On the other hand, for males, the percentage rises between Grades 7 and 8 and then levels off for Grades 9 through 12.

#### 7.4 Correlates of Suicidal Ideations

A number of student attributes are positively associated with suicide ideations. For example, of all students in the province who have considered suicide one or more times in the year preceding the survey, 50% binge eat at least once in a while as compared to 31% of all students who did not consider suicide in the past year.

Again, the high rates of low self-esteem, emotional distress, and a history of abuse among students who have considered suicide seem particularly noteworthy.

#### 7.5 History of Sexual and Physical Abuse

In the survey students were asked whether they had ever been physically or sexually abused. It is important to note that the perpetrator of the perceived abuse was not identified. Thus, the estimates presented below do not represent data for intrafamilial abuse, but rather reflect youths' perceptions of having been abused.

- Approximately 85% of male students and 68% of female students in the province report no history of abuse.
- Male students are likely to report being only physically abused at some time in their lives.
- While females are just as likely to report being physically abused, they are considerably more likely than males to report being sexually abused or both physically and sexually abused.
- Rates of both types of abuse during one's lifetime are substantially higher among females than males at all grade levels.
- For male students, the rates of physical abuse are fairly constant across all grade levels, while the rates of reported sexual abuse rise slightly with grade level.
- However, for female students, the rates of both physical and sexual abuse increase steadily between Grades 7 and 11 and then decline slightly among Grade 12 students.

#### 7.6 Correlates of Abuse

- Among all students in B.C., 19% report a history of physical abuse and 12% report a history of sexual abuse.
- Among students who live with only one parent, 29% report being physically abused compared to the average of 19% among all students.
- More students who are emotionally distressed, have low self-esteem and have considered suicide reported some abuse.

### 7.7 Self-Esteem or Self-Worth

A number of studies have suggested that low self-esteem increases the likelihood that youth will engage in risk-taking or health-compromising behaviours. Self-esteem is also closely related to mental health status.

- Most students in B.C. maintain a favourable view of their self-worth or esteem.
- 9% indicated that they possess low self-esteem, 55% have a medium level of self-esteem and 36% have high self-esteem.
- The proportion of males and females with high self-esteem generally declines as grade level increases.
- Conversely, the proportion with low self-esteem is fairly constant for males, but for females, it increases between Grades 7 and 9, levels off for Grades 10 and 11 and then decreases among students in Grade 12.
- Despite these trends, female students are generally more likely to have low self-esteem (13% of females vs 5% of males), while male students are more likely to have high self-esteem (43% of males vs 29% of females).

## **8. Sexual Health and Behaviours**

Sexual activity among teenagers poses special risks, such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

### 8.1 Prevalence of Sexual Activity

- Approximately 33% of all male students and 28% of all female students in the survey report they have had sexual intercourse at least once.
- However, figures show the rates for both males and females rise dramatically with grade level. For Grade 12 students, 55% of the males and 52% of the females report having had sexual intercourse one or more times.
- Also a larger percentage of males than females in Grades 7 through 9 report ever having sexual intercourse. However, this difference virtually disappears for Grades 10 through 12.
- The majority of students have had sexual intercourse for the first time in the 14 to 16 year age range (62% of females and 51% of males). Males are more likely than females to become sexually active at age 12 or younger (24% vs. 14%).

The risk of contracting an STD through sexual intercourse increases with sexual activity. As a result, the number of sexual partners is a well-established risk factor for contracting STDs.

- Overall, 40% of students report just one partner, 33% report two or three partners, 11% report four or five partners and 16% report six or more partners in their lifetime.
- It appears that males are somewhat more likely than females to report having had multiple sexual partners (63% vs. 56%).
- Multiple sexual partners in one's lifetime generally increases with grade level for both sexes.
- 36% of sexually active students reported zero sexual partners in the past three months, 49% only one partner, 8% two partners and 7% three or more partners.
- The proportion of students who report zero sexual partners in the past three months declines with grade level for both sexes, but is generally higher among males than females (41% vs 30%).
- On the other hand, it is the males in Grades 8 and 9 who are most likely to report having had three or more sexual partners in the past three months.

### 8.2 Informed About AIDS?

Although there are no guarantees that sexually active teens can avoid HIV infection entirely, if they are informed, they can reduce the likelihood of ever developing AIDS.

- Overall, 84% of students in the province indicated they had been taught about AIDS, 72% knew how or where to get information, 50% had talked with their parents and just 9% held the incorrect belief one can get AIDS from insects.
- Being informed about AIDS appears to increase somewhat with grade level, especially when it comes to having been taught about AIDS in school and knowing where or how to get information on AIDS.

### 8.3 Risk of Contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)

The use of condoms is an important means of preventing STDs.

- Among all sexually active students in the province, 64% of males and 53% of females report that they used a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.
- Highest rate for reported use of condoms is among those in Grade 8 for female students (69%) and among those in Grade 9 for male students (71%).
- For both sexes, however, the reported use of condoms declines appreciably between Grades 9 and 12.
- It would appear that students in the upper grades are better informed about AIDS, yet among the sexually active, these older students appear to be even less likely to use condoms as a protection against STDs.

#### 8.4 Contraceptive Usage

- Overall, 49% of sexually active students used condoms, 25% used birth control pills, 2% used some other method, 8% used withdrawal, 13% did not use any method and 3% were not sure what method was used.
- Condom use appears to decline with grade level for both sexes, while the use of birth control pills increases with grade level.
- The use of some form of birth control (ie, condoms, the pill, or some other method) was practised by 77% of all males and 76% of all females and these rates increase steadily from Grade 7 through Grade 12.
- 10% of male students and 11% of female students who are sexually active indicated that they had either been pregnant or had caused a pregnancy at least once.

#### 8.5 Correlates of Multiple Sexual Partners

A number of student attributes are positively associated with having had multiple sexual partners during one's lifetime. For example, of all students who have had two or more sexual partners in their lifetime, 60% binge drink (5+ drinks/day) at least once a month as compared to 38% of all students who have had just one sexual partner in their lifetime.

Those with multiple sexual partners appear to be compounding their risks by also being even more likely to: 1) have had sex for the first time before the age of thirteen, 2) not have used a condom the last time, 3) have consumed alcohol or drugs before having sex the last time.

#### 8.6 Sexual Orientation

When asked about their sexual orientation 93% of males and 92% of females described themselves as mostly or completely heterosexual.

- 5% of males and 7% of females reported they are not sure of their sexual orientation.
- Although few students in Grades 7 to 12 adopt a homosexual label, fantasies involving same sex partners are reported by 3% of males and 4% of females.

### 9. Substance Use and Abuse

The use of illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco by adolescents still remains a problem in Canada, despite declining levels of use and increased awareness of the dangers of these substances.

#### 9.1 Substance Use

Three-quarters of all students in B.C. report never having used marijuana. The rate for males across all grades is 74% and for females across all grades it is 77%.

- The prevalence of marijuana use increases substantially with grade level for both sexes and is highest amongst students in Grades 11 and 12. 27% of males and 20% of females in Grade 12 report having used marijuana ten or more times in their lives. The trend lines for male and female students are very similar and suggest that the majority of students who have tried marijuana did so between the ages of 13 and 16 years (ie, 64% of males and 75% of females). However, 13% of males and 6% of females who have used marijuana tried it for the first time at age 10 or under.
- 49% of students reporting marijuana use indicated they had not used marijuana at all in the month preceding the survey, 24% had used it one or two times, 14% had used it three to nine times and 13% had used it ten or more times. More frequent use, three or more times in the past month, was reported by 31% of males compared to 23% of females.
- Cocaine use among students in B.C. is quite rare; 95% of all students reported never having even tried cocaine.
- 84% of males and females reported never having tried drugs such as LSD, PCP, ecstasy, mushrooms, speed, ice, heroin or other pills without a doctor's prescription. However, experimentation does increase steadily with grade level for both sexes.
- 69% of all students in B.C. assessed that the risk of harm from the occasional use of illegal drugs was "a lot" and a further 20% assessed that the risk was "some". Generally, males were slightly more likely than females to assess the risk to be only "a little" or "not at all" (13% vs. 9%).

## 9.2 Alcohol Use

Alcohol use by adolescents, particularly heavy use, has been conclusively linked to motor vehicle accidents and deaths, physical fights, destroyed property, academic problems, job difficulties and troubles with law enforcement officials.

- Two-thirds of all students in the province reported some use of alcohol in their lifetime. Only 34% of male students and 36% of female students reported never using alcohol.
- The amount of experimentation with alcohol tends to increase dramatically with grade level. By Grade 12 only 14% of the males and 19% of the females have never used alcohol.
- The majority of students commence drinking alcohol between the ages of eleven and fourteen years (ie, 52% of males and 63% of females). However, the figures also show that 34% of males and 20% of females had their first drink at age ten or under.
- The frequency of alcohol use by students rises substantially with grade level for both sexes. Yet, even among alcohol users, most students report only drinking a few times or not at all in the past month (ie, 67% of males and 71% of females). However, heavier use defined as drinking on six or more days in the past month (ie, more than just occasional weekend drinking), was reported by 18% of males and 13% of females.
- 64% of students who have used alcohol indicated they had not done any binge drinking in the previous month (binge drinking was defined as consuming five or more drinks in a single day).

Nevertheless, reports of binge drinking do increase with grade level for both sexes, but especially for males.

### 9.3 Cigarette and Tobacco Use

The effect of tobacco use on health is well known, yet experimentation with smoking is occurring at younger and younger ages and initiation of smoking now occurs almost entirely during the adolescent years.

- Among all students in B.C., 23% of males and 28% of females reported that they currently smoke cigarettes either occasionally or regularly (everyday). The percentage increases considerably with grade level for both sexes.
- The majority of students who have ever smoked indicated they first tried smoking cigarettes between the ages of 11 and 14 years (ie, 58% of males and 65% of females). Nonetheless, the figure also shows that experimentation with cigarettes under the age of 9 is clearly higher among males than females.
- Overall, 50% of males and 59% of females said they had tried to quit smoking cigarettes in the past six months. More females than males indicated they had tried to quit at every grade level, with the exception of Grade 7 students.
- Compared to cigarette smoking, the use of chewing tobacco or snuff among students in B.C. is quite rare (ie, < 4%). Overall, 91% of male students reported not using chewing tobacco or snuff.

### 9.4 Correlates of Risky Drug and Alcohol Use

A number of student attributes are positively correlated with risky alcohol and marijuana use. These attributes are all positively associated with risky alcohol consumption. For example, of all students who had alcohol on six or more days in the past month, 31% felt that there was little or no risk of harm from occasional illegal drug use as compared to 9% of all students who had alcohol on less than six days in the past month.

As seen in other chapters of this report, risky drug and alcohol use appears to be associated with a number of other risk-taking behaviours and health risk factors.

## 10. Conclusions: Challenges and opportunities

While the intent of this report is to highlight the major health issues and concerns confronting youth in B.C., there are many areas where their health and vitality shine through the survey findings. It is apparent that most students in the province are not ill, not depressed, not abusing drugs and have not been pregnant. Most students are not violent, have not experienced abuse and have not considered or attempted suicide. On the contrary, most are healthy, happy, live in a nurturing environment, like school and do not engage in excessive risk-taking. To summarize, it should be remembered that most students in B.C. enjoy good health and are very likely to continue to do so.

The present report, nevertheless, does raise some warning flags and highlights some important health issues. The report has also identified a number of important regional differences in health and health risk factors, as well as how students in B.C. generally fare quite well when compared to students elsewhere in Canada and in the United States. While the portrait painted here is cause for some alarm, one should not conclude that this picture of youth health in B.C. is unavoidable. Most of the threats to youth health which have been identified in this report involve risk-taking and these are indeed preventable activities.

The challenge we face here in B.C., individually and collectively, is to continue to provide high quality health services while at the same time to work to preserve and promote the health and well-being of our youth. The Adolescent Health Survey provides some important benchmarks with which to gauge our success in meeting this challenge. It is our hope that the survey will aid efforts to maintain and support the health of youth and to more effectively plan and deliver health services in the future.

To obtain a copy of the survey: *McCreary Centre Society, Fax (604) 875-2890*