

OHT – The Truth About Common Myths

Why Should My Child Participate in the OHT Survey?

The Oregon Healthy Teens (OHT) survey is a comprehensive, school-based, anonymous and voluntary survey about health behaviors. It is a key part of state-wide efforts to help local schools and communities ensure that all Oregon youth are healthy and successful learners who contribute positively to their communities. Research has demonstrated that healthy students are more likely to be successful in school. They have better attendance, get higher grades and test scores and are less likely to skip school, drop out or engage in risky behaviors.

OHT enables schools and communities to know how many students are developing successfully and how many are having problems. Schools can then focus on improving outcomes for young people. It is an important tool that schools can use to help students achieve their full potential. OHT results help schools and communities identify problems and measure progress towards addressing them.

What Questions Do You Ask and Why?

The OHT Survey asks about resilience factors and risk behaviors that directly impact students' health and well-being, including:

- Absenteeism
- Emerging public health issues, such as e-cigarettes
- Nutrition and physical activity
- Physical, emotional and mental health
- Sexual behavior relating to the prevention of unintended pregnancies and STDs
- Substance use, abuse and addiction (alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and prescription drug use)
- Demographics, including race, ethnicity, and sexual and gender identity, to assess and address health disparities.

One of the benefits of the OHT Survey is that it generates discussions within the family, the school and the community on important topics and how they fit within the context of core values and beliefs.

The truth about common myths

Myth: Asking kids about risky behaviors encourages them to try it.

TRUTH. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) states that there is *no evidence* that simply asking students about health risk behaviors encourages that behavior. Asking youth about sensitive topics such as suicide, sex, drugs or alcohol does not harm them and does not encourage these behaviors.

Questions are age-appropriate and presented in a straightforward and sensitive manner. Students can choose not to answer any question that may make them uncomfortable.

Myth: Students are forced to take the survey.

TRUTH. Opting out of the survey can happen at any level (district, school, parent/guardian and student).

OHT uses an active notification/passive consent process for informing parents/guardians of the survey. Schools are required to notify parents at least 2 weeks before the survey, using an active method (mail or email).

Myth: Kids lie, so results aren't accurate.

TRUTH. Protecting student *confidentiality and anonymity* is paramount. Studies show that surveys such as OHT give more accurate results than those where students believe their answers can be traced. There is *no identifying information* that links responses to a particular student, parent or family.

Sometimes students do exaggerate. But survey data from adolescents is as reliable as data collected from adults. Internal reliability and logic checks help identify the small percentage of students who falsify answers.

What Changes Have Resulted From OHT Data?

OHT data are used to reduce and prevent tobacco use:

- OHT data helped inform the St. Helens City Council and La Grande City leaders to pass a Tobacco-free Parks ordinance in June 2015.
- Klamath County uses OHT data to engage and encourage youth groups and organizations in their prevention activities, such as Health Impact Assessments, Blue Zones Project (community-wide well-being improvement initiative to help make healthy choices easier for Oregonians), and SPArC (Strategies for Policy and Environmental Change) Tobacco Retail Assessment grant applications to prevent tobacco and nicotine use among the county's youth.
- Umatilla County presented OHT data to County Commissioners to frame the strategy of using Tobacco Retail Licensing as a method of limiting tobacco retail sales in proximity to schools and youth organizations.
- Smokefree Oregon (<http://smokefreeoregon.com/>) and the Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids (https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/oregon) feature OHT data to help inform the public about tobacco use among Oregon's youth and the accessibility of tobacco products.
- The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) distributes County Tobacco Fact Sheets (<https://public.health.oregon.gov/PreventionWellness/TobaccoPrevention/Documents/countyfacts/OHA-Columbia-TobaccoFactSheet.pdf>) that highlight OHT data to educate the public and policy makers about the dangers and prevalence of tobacco use among adolescents. Tobacco Fact Sheets are distributed to:
 - The general public at community events
 - Presentations to local service groups, such as Kiwanis and Rotary
 - Decision makers, such as City Council Members and Board of County Commissioners
 - The Public Health Foundation of Columbia County Board

Survey data also facilitate environmental change for safer, healthier schools and communities:

- The City of Rainier implemented a stoplight and signaled crosswalk at U.S. 30 and Veterans Way as a result of The Public Health Foundation of Columbia County (TPHFCC) report: Connecting Rural Communities: US 30 % rainier Veterans Way Crossing. OHT data was used as part of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to examine the health and safety outcomes of the proposed changes.
- Worksite Wellness used OHT data to help shape policies regarding vending machines, sugar-sweetened beverages and physical activity to help pass HB 2650, taking junk food out of Oregon school cafeterias and vending machines.
- Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition (OSSCC) used OHT harassment data to educate state legislators about the Safe Schools Bill (HB2599), which became law.

OHT data are used to obtain funding:

- Umatilla County used OHT data in a proposal for Title V funding.
- Clackamas County Outside In used OHT data in an application to Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to demonstrate need to obtain funding for the School-based Health Center at Milwaukie High School.