Disability and Health Risks
Among Rhode Island Public High School Students in 2007

Rhode Island Department of Health
Center for Health Data and Analysis & Office of Special Healthcare Needs
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Introduction
This report presents data on rates of disability for demographic subgroups and rates for twenty-six health indicators for public high school students with and without disability. Data are from Rhode Island’s 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

About the YRBS: The YRBS is an anonymous and voluntary survey among random samples of high school students in over 60 states and municipalities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the YRBS to monitor risk behaviors related to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

Rhode Island’s YRBS: In the spring of 2007, 2,210 Rhode Island adolescents participated in the YRBS with a 66% response rate. These weighted, self-reported findings are representative of 9th to 12th grade public high school students statewide and can be used to make important inferences concerning health-risk behaviors.

Disability Definition: Students were defined as having disabilities if they said “yes” to at least one of these questions: 1) Do you have any physical disabilities or long-term health problems? 2) Do you have any long-term emotional problems or learning disabilities? Long-term is 6 months or more.

Reading statistics: This report presents bar graphs showing percentages and 95% confidence intervals (CI). As percentages from survey data are estimates, the 95% CI indicates the range of values within which the “true” value lies 95% of the time. When two groups have a 95% CI that overlap, it indicates that the “true” values are likely to be similar in both groups. If the 95% CI’s do not overlap, it indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Highlights
- 23% of students identified themselves as having a disability. (Fig 1)
- Students with disabilities are more likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, and use marijuana before the age of 13. They are also more likely to continue these risky behaviors by currently smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and using marijuana. Students with disabilities are more likely to report feelings of hopelessness and to consider and attempt suicide. (Fig 2)
- Students with disabilities are more likely to be threatened, physically fight, be forced to have sex, and not go to school due to feeling unsafe. Students with disabilities are more likely to be overweight and get insufficient physical activity. (Fig 3)

Implications
This analysis of the 2007 YRBS provides an opportunity to identify the impacts of disability status on youth behavior and outcomes. Although students with and without disabilities participate in risky behaviors, the data indicate that students with disabilities participate in these behaviors earlier, more consistently, and to a more dangerous level than their peers. Youth with disabilities are in need of targeted school and community programming to increase positive outcomes, such as increasing the following opportunities:
- Well-integrated academic intervention
- Positive social and recreational activities
- Programs that support self-determination
- Interventions that address behavioral health care needs
- Effective transition planning from school to adulthood including academic, vocational, and healthcare
- Connections to appropriate adult role models
- Support for community based experiences such as employment

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Further information: For the YRBS refer to http://www.health.ri.gov/chic/statistics/yrbs.php, or contact the Center for Health Data and Analysis, RI Department of Health (401-222-7628); for the Office of Special Healthcare Needs refer to http://www.health.ri.gov/family/specialneeds/index.php.

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Figure 1
Disability* Among RI Public High Schools
(Grades 9-12 students) within demographic subgroups -- 2007

Total: All 23

Sex:
Male 21
Female 24

Grade:
9th grade 22
10th grade 12
11th grade 22
12th grade 12

Race/Ethnicity:
White, Non-hispanic 24
Black/African American 13
Hispanic/Latino 21
Other 12

Sexual orientation:
Heterosexual 20
LGB/Unsure** 50

Language***:
Speak English at home 23
Speak non-Eng at home 23

Self-reported grades:
Mostly A&B 19
Mostly C 25
Mostly D&F 36

Bars indicate 95% Confidence intervals (See page 1)

Source: 2007 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,210)
* Disability: Any physical disabilities/long-term (6 months) health problems or long-term emotional problems/learning disabilites
** LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure
*** Primary Language: Students usually speak at home (English/Spanish/Portuguese/Cape Verdean Creole/Other)
Figure 2
Risk Behaviors Among RI Public High Schools
(Grades 9-12 students) by disability* -- 2007

- Tried Cigarettes Before Age 13
  smoked a whole cigarette for the first time
  Not disability (1,483) 20
  Have disability (444) 19

- Current Cigarette Smoking
  smoked cigarettes on 1+ of the past 30 days
  Not disability (1,483) 27
  Have disability (444) 11

- Tried Alcohol Before Age 13
  other than a few sips before age 15 years
  Not disability (1,483) 30
  Have disability (444) 16

- Current Alcohol Drinking
  1 drink of alcohol on 1+ of pst 30 dgs
  Not disability (1,483) 51
  Have disability (444) 40

- Alcohol & Riding
  1+ times rode in car after driver drank alcohol pst 30 dgs
  Not disability (1,483) 31
  Have disability (444) 25

- Alcohol & Driving
  1+ times drove car after drinking alcohol pst 30 dgs
  Not disability (1,483) 12
  Have disability (444) 8

- Tried Marijuana Before Age 13
  tried marijuana for the first time
  Not disability (1,483) 16
  Have disability (444) 6

- Current Marijuana Use
  1+ times used marijuana during the past 30 days
  Not disability (1,483) 29
  Have disability (444) 21

- Sexual Intercourse Before Age 13
  had sexual intercourse for the first time
  Not disability (1,483) 9
  Have disability (444) 5

- Recent Sexual Intercourse
  with 1+ people during the past 3 months
  Not disability (1,483) 42
  Have disability (444) 31

- Felt Sad or Hopeless
  every day for two weeks/stop some usual activities pst 12 mos
  Not disability (1,483) 41
  Have disability (444) 16

- Considered Suicide
  seriously considered attempting suicide during pst 12 mos
  Not disability (1,483) 22
  Have disability (444) 7

- Attempted Suicide
  attempted suicide 1+ times in pst 12 mos
  Not disability (1,483) 17
  Have disability (444) 6

Source: 2007 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,210)
* Disability: Any physical disabilities/long-term (6 months) health problems or long-term emotional problems/learning disabilities
Figure 3
Risk Behaviors Among RI Public High Schools
(Grades 9-12 students) by disability* -- 2007

- Offered an Illegal Drug By Someone
  on school property during the past 12 months
  Bars indicate 95% Confidence intervals (See page 1)

- Carry Weapon
  such as a gun/knife/club on 1+ day in the past 30 days

- Not Go to School
  due to unsafe feelings at school or on the way to/from school

- Threatened/Injured
  with a weapon such as gun/knife/club at school past 12 mos

- Physical Fight
  one or more times during the past 12 months

- Hit by Boyfriend/Girlfriend
  ever hit/struck/physically hurt on purpose past 12 mos

- Forced Sex
  physically forced to have sexual intercourse when didn’t want

- Slightly or Very Overweight
  described by students

- Exercise to Lose Weight
  or keep from gaining weight during past 30 days

- Eat Less Food to Lose Weight
  or keep from gaining weight during past 30 days

- Insufficient Physical Activity
  for total of > 60 min/day on 5+ days of past 7 days

- Watch 3+ Hours/Day of TV
  on an average school day

- Play Video or Computer Game
  3+ hours per day on an average school day

Source: 2007 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=2,210)
* Disability: Any physical disabilities/long-term (6 months) health problems or long-term emotional problems/learning disabilities