

Frequently Asked Questions for Families

What is the Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey (YAS)?

The YAS is a countywide online survey about the health behaviors of 8th, 10th and 12th grade students. The first YAS was completed in 2005. Fall of 2021 is the ninth administration of the survey, which is given every other year. You can view the most recent YAS report and companion resources at the [Ottawa County YAS website](#).

Why should my student participate in the YAS?

Results of the YAS can be utilized in the following ways:

- Determine the prevalence of health behaviors
- Assess whether health behaviors increase, decrease, or stay the same over time
- Examine the co-occurrence of health behaviors
- Provide comparable data among subpopulations of youth.
- As a source of data to initiate meaningful conversations between parents/guardians and their student
- Inform faith community and other youth leaders' as to what students are facing, thinking about, or doing
- Understand at what age youth first try various risk behaviors, so prevention efforts are timely
- Make data-driven decisions on the most pressing & prevalent issues to address in school health education programs
- Develop school reproductive health curriculum content and objectives specific to student needs
- Implement community programs and services to reduce risks and enable students and families to be successful

When do students take the YAS?

During the fall in every odd-numbered year.

What grade levels take the survey and how are these students selected?

Schools are instructed to give the survey to a sample of 8th, 10th and 12th grade students representing a cross-section of the student body. For the 2021 administration of the YAS, some school systems have also included a sample of students in grades 7th, 9th, and 11th. Ideally, the survey is administered in typical required classes for each grade which have students from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Student participation is voluntary and parents/guardians may remove their consent when they receive a parent notification from their student's school.

What types of questions are asked?

Students are asked questions regarding their health and risk behaviors in the following areas: unintentional injuries; violence and bullying; social media involvement and sexting; sadness and suicidal behavior; alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; dietary behavior, hunger and physical activity; overweight and weight perception; housing; stress; sexual health & behavior; and various protective factors. While sexual health questions are optional for each school district, most elect to include these questions so staff and families may use data-informed strategies to support safe and healthy student decisions. Questions are similar to those asked by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) and the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) [Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth](#)

Are you asking about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)?

Over the past several years, there has been a concerted effort both in Michigan and in Ottawa County to understand and mitigate the impact of childhood trauma. The work at the state level has led to the inclusion of an 11 question ACES module in the adult Behavioral Risk Factor Survey administered through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This work and data collection has enabled Michigan to secure a multi-year, multi-million dollar grant from the CDC to improve our state's ability to monitor and mitigate childhood trauma. This state-level project will soon be encouraging local municipalities to begin collecting ACES data on youth. In addition, there has been considerable work done in Ottawa County to understand ACES prevalence in the community, and to build protective resiliency factors. Because ACES occur in childhood (before age 18), the best opportunity for prevention is at younger ages, rather than in adulthood. Because of this, and with the support of schools and other community partners, the Ottawa County YAS Committee has added the CDC's youth ACES module into the survey. We understand the sensitive nature of these questions and will be sharing resources with students and the teachers administering the YAS.

The YAS Committee is committed to, wherever possible, utilizing research based, fidelity tested and validated survey tools and questions. The youth ACES module questions were provided by staff at the State of Michigan who oversee the CDC's Youth Behavior Risk Factor Survey.



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Why does the YAS contain questions about sexual health & behavior?

Sexual behaviors questions primarily relate to the risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV infection. Some questions help to identify protective factors to reduce early sexual activity. In response to parent and school concerns, the 2019 survey added questions assessing a student's exposure to pornography the prevalence and first age of exposure.

There are national and State of Michigan youth surveys. Why does Ottawa County need one?

Surveys conducted only on a national or state level, onetime surveys, and surveys addressing only certain categories of health-risk behaviors cannot meet the need for local data to implement and fund interventions and resilience programs to support Ottawa County youth. While both CDC's and MDE's surveys provide valuable youth data, the YAS is widely utilized by districts in Ottawa County, providing more robust local data. Since both the survey and data are locally "owned", Ottawa's survey is responsive to community concerns and emerging issues, has full data available for special analysis needs and has local experts who can provide consultation and presentation support to the community.

How is the data used and by whom?

The data is used by school personnel and community service organizations to assess youth needs and how they are changing, plan prevention and intervention strategies, secure and keep grant funds, and monitor progress by tracking trend data.

What steps have been taken to ensure student and district confidentiality?

Students record their responses on a computer, providing no individual identifying information. Only countywide results are presented in the final report. With their permission, schools may have their district level results compiled into a report.

Does it cost schools anything to participate?

There is no cost to the school or district. Funding for the project is a collaborative effort of the Ottawa Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition, the Ottawa County Department of Public Health, the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, and area Community Foundations.

What does a school or district receive in exchange for participating?

Schools or school districts do not receive any financial compensation for participation, only a report of their results.

How long does it take students to complete the survey?

Some students will need a maximum of 45-50 minutes; or not more than one class period. Many can finish in as little as 20 minutes.

How many Ottawa County districts/schools have participated in past administrations?

Participation in the YAS has grown since 2005. In 2021, eleven school systems are planning to participate; including public and private school systems, academies, and alternative education programs.

Who coordinates the YAS process?

The Ottawa County Youth Assessment Committee Members: Arbor Circle; Greater Ottawa County United Way; Lakeshore Regional Entity; Ottawa Area Intermediate School District; and the Ottawa County Department of Public Health.

I have more questions, who should I contact?

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