

# ALL STUDENTS COUNT COALITION: TRANSGENDER STATUS

## What is the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS) optional question and response options for transgender status?

*Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?*

- A. No, I am not transgender
- B. Yes, I am transgender
- C. I am not sure if I am transgender
- D. I do not know what this question is asking

*What is the rationale for including this optional transgender status question on my site's YRBS?*

## What is the rationale for including this optional transgender status question in my site's YRBS?

The CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health released findings from the 2017 YRBS, which, for the first time, asked students if they identified as transgender. 2,555 young people responded, "Yes, I am transgender." The study polled ten states (Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin) and nine municipalities (Boston, Broward County, Cleveland, District of Columbia, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, Oakland, San Diego, and San Francisco). The study found that almost two percent of high school students identified as transgender and highlighted a number of disparities faced by transgender youth.

As many studies have illustrated, transgender students are more impacted by a variety of disparities, including victimization (bullying, abuse, sexual harassment) and unfortunate health outcomes (depression, suicide, drug use).

Since 2017, the CDC has approved this transgender status question, which allows YRBSS sites to examine transgender status among students and their association to various health risks. In the 2019 YRBS, 15 YRBSS states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania) and

fifteen municipalities (Boston, Broward County, Chicago, Cleveland, Easton RESA, Genesse, Los Angeles, Nashville, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, DC) asked the transgender status question.

Eight YRBSS states (Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin) and eight cities (Boston, Broward County, Cleveland, District of Columbia, Los Angeles, New York City, San Diego, San Francisco) have used the question in two YRBSS cycles (2017 and 2019).

## Have researchers conducted additional analysis from the CDC's 2017 findings?

In October 2020, the All Students Count Coalition released **On All Sides: How Race, Ethnicity & Gender Influence Health Risk for Transgender Students of Color**, on transgender student's intersectional health disparities. The research questions included 1) Among those health risk behaviors and outcomes that differ significantly between transgender and cisgender students, which also vary among different racial and ethnic groups? and 2) Among those health risk behaviors and outcomes that differ significantly in the first question, which are also statistically significant at the intersections of race, ethnicity and transgender identity? This landmark report recognizes that available literature details the profound health disparities students of color endure due to social, economic, environmental, and structural disparities. Furthermore, some literature describes health disparities between transgender and cisgender students due to similar reasons. Yet, limited population-based data focuses exclusively on the health risk behavior and outcomes of transgender students of color.

## What are some of the findings?

The 2017 On All Sides report found the data set confirms transgender students are comparable to cisgender students in that they are distributed similarly by age, grade and race.

The report finds significant intersectional disparities in one or more outcomes across 10 health categories, which include both health risk behaviors and health outcomes. The greatest health risk behaviors and health outcome disparity gaps between cisgender and transgender

students were most frequently largest within Asian Pacific Islander and Latinx groups rather than white or Black students

### Sadness and Suicidality

- Our **On All Sides** report found, as expected, that sadness and suicidality differ significantly between transgender and cisgender students. For example, 54.4% of transgender students report feeling sad or hopeless, while 31.2% of cisgender students report this. Although many schools develop interventions to reduce weapons in school toward males, our results show that masculine females are far more likely to bring weapons to school than other females. By broadening efforts to reduce sadness and suicidality that intentionally include transgender students, schools can better develop programs and improve support.

### Substance Use

- Transgender students are at greater risk for usage of particular substances. For example, the CDC's 2017 report found that a higher percentage of transgender students also reported lifetime use of all substances except marijuana than did cisgender male and cisgender female students; marijuana use was more prevalent among transgender students than among cisgender male students only. This information can support schools to identify health risks and target prevention and treatment programs.

### How does adding this question to my YRBS support transgender students?

The transgender status question will support key stakeholders develop a greater understanding of students that identify as transgender and how they relate to health risks among students. Sites that include the transgender status YRBSS question are better situated to understand the depth and breadth of the disparities that transgender students, especially those of color, experience, to create or modify programs and policies to meet their particular needs, and to improve their access to safe and supportive environments. If state and local education and health agencies have no way to identify the health risks facing transgender students, they will be unable to address the needs of these vulnerable students.

### Resources:

- **All Students Count Coalition**
- **On All Sides: How Race, Ethnicity & Gender Influence Health Risk for Transgender Students of Color**
- **Johns MM, Lowry R, Andrzejewski J, et al. Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students – 19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2019;68:67–71. Table 4: Number and percentage of students, by sexual identity. High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS): 2019 Results. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/2019\\_tables/students\\_by\\_sexual\\_identity.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/2019_tables/students_by_sexual_identity.htm)**

For more information, check out our **website** or contact Armonté Butler at [ascc@advocatesforyouth.org](mailto:ascc@advocatesforyouth.org)