

Introduction

Nearly half of all deaths occurring annually are the result of modifiable behavioral risk factors (McGinnis, 1993). These risk factors include uncontrolled hypertension, diabetes, smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, alcohol abuse, violence and risky sexual behavior. It has been estimated that control of fewer than 10 risk factors could prevent between 40 and 70 percent of all premature deaths, a third of all cases of acute disability and two-thirds of all cases of chronic disability (Sullivan, 1991).

In an effort to measure and address these health issues, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) implemented the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) in the mid-1980s with 15 states. The BRFSS survey consists of telephone interviews using randomly generated telephone numbers to determine the households contacted. The survey contains a core set of questions provided by CDC to gather comprehensive, standard information nationwide. The questions asked concern health status, access to health care, health awareness, use of preventive services, and knowledge and attitude assessment.

The BRFSS now includes all 50 states, five territories and the District of Columbia, comprising the largest ongoing telephone health survey in the world. The Pennsylvania Department of Health has been participating in the BRFSS since 1989.

The BRFSS survey results provide valuable tools in measuring health trends, assessing chronic disease risk and monitoring the effectiveness of policies, programs and awareness campaigns. The information obtained from the data is used to guide health policy decisions, monitor progress toward achieving national year 2020 health objectives, propose and support legislation, develop public awareness strategies, and identify critical areas for future attention.

Since sample data were used in this report, it was necessary to use weighted data for calculating percentages. This was done to adjust for under-representation of certain population subgroups in the sample. Confidence intervals (at the 95 percent level) were also calculated and shown for percentages to provide a basis for quality analysis and comparability. Please review the Technical Notes section in the back of this report for more thorough discussions of these and other data concerns.

The Bureau of Informatics and Information Technology welcomes comments on the content and format of this report and the data. Copies of BRFSS data and additional statistics are available upon request.

Please direct all comments, questions and requests for data to:

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This report and many other health statistics are available on the Health Statistics website at <http://www.statistics.health.pa.gov>.