

# Teen vices

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Indiana teens haven't reduced their risky behavior by much in the past two years, according to the results of a national survey released Thursday. Drug and alcohol use was down but the smoking rates flat-lined. The percentage of teens reporting they had sex remained unchanged. And while Indiana teens reported that they get more exercise than the average teen, they don't eat enough fruits and vegetables and too many of them are obese. The Indiana State Department of Health released the results of the 2009 youth risk behavioral survey. Teens in grades 9 through 12 at participating schools across Indiana answered the confidential survey conducted by the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The results are used to gauge current programs and public health policies, to develop new programs and to demonstrate need when applying for grant funding, state health officials said Thursday. teen smoking vices " The problem area continues to be nutritional choices, obesity, " said Dr. Gregory Larkin, state health commissioner. " We have seen some improvement in tobacco choices. "Twenty-three percent of Indiana teens said they had smoked a cigarette during the past month, which is up from 22 percent from the 2007 survey. The national average is 19. 5 percent. In comparison, the number of teens who had tried a cigarette dropped from 53 percent in 2007 to 52 percent for the most recent survey. Larkin said some states have made greater strides in tackling tobacco use than Indiana. But he believes that increases in the state's cigarette tax and the rising number of communities with smoking bans have affected smoking rates among teens. Making it easier to make healthy instead of unhealthy choices is the goal to reduce smoking and to get teens moving, Larkin said. Although Hoosier teens reported they exercised more than the national

average, almost 3 percent of Indiana teens are obese, compared with the national average of 12 percent, the survey results said. The state's obesity rate has slightly improved, though the data suggest the rest of the country is getting heavier, Larkin said. He questioned whether the amount of exercise teens reported was accurate. One person's physical activity might seem sedentary to others, Larkin said. The number of teens who watched three or more hours of TV a day increased and the percentage of teens spending three or more hours on the computer or playing video games also increased. Fewer reported attending physical education classes at school. Only 16 percent of teens reported eating five or more fruits or vegetables per day in the past week compared with 18 percent in 2007, the survey said. " Exercise alone doesn't address obesity, " Larkin said. " It's your food choices, too. "The state's Healthy Weight Initiative will release a plan this summer with strategies and guidelines for schools to improve food choices and increase physical activity, officials said. Larkin said other initiatives such as \$20 million in state funding for constructing recreational trails should improve physical fitness. And INShape Indiana, a Web-based clearinghouse of resources to help and motivate people to lose weight and stop smoking, will help teens and adults adopt a healthier lifestyle, he said. Also in the survey, the number of teens who had sexual intercourse barely dropped. The number of teens requiring medical treatment after attempting suicide increased to 3.6 percent, and more teens reported feeling sad or hopeless. " This generation needs to make a lot of changes, " Larkin said. Access to cheap, high-calorie food and competition with smart phones and gaming

systems make those changes difficult, he said." The challenge for public health is to make the right choices easier than the wrong choices. "