

Perception of Community Safety and Health

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2017, 2019, 2023

Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2019, 2021, 2023

October 2025

A vast majority of Vermonters feel safe to walk in their community (90%). However, since 2017, more Vermonters are rating their communities as slightly safe or not at all safe for walking (9% in 2017 to 12% in 2023), and more middle schoolers reported not going to school due to feeling unsafe (9% in 2019 to 13% in 2023). The data in this brief describes feelings of community safety over time in Vermont and how a lack of feeling safe is associated with poor health outcomes. Improving feelings of community safety may improve health outcomes for adults and youth in Vermont.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact ahs.vdhdpdpanalytics@vermont.gov.

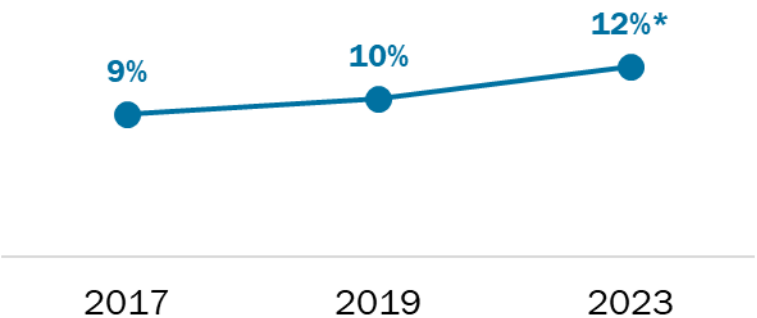
Key Points

- The percentage of Vermont adults who feel slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in their community is increasing
- Feelings of safety vary by region
- Adults who feel their community is slightly or not safe to walk in are more likely to have depression
- There is an increasing number of middle schoolers who do not go to school due to feeling unsafe
- The percent of students who engage in physical activity and walk or bike to school is decreasing

Feelings of community safety

- The percent of Vermonters who rate their communities as slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in has increased over time.
- In 2017, 9% of Vermont adults felt their community was slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in.
- In 2023, 12% of Vermont adults felt their community was slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in. This is a statistically significant increase from 2019.

The percentage of Vermont adults who feel their community is **slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in** increased significantly from 2017 to 2023.



* Denotes statistical significance from 2017

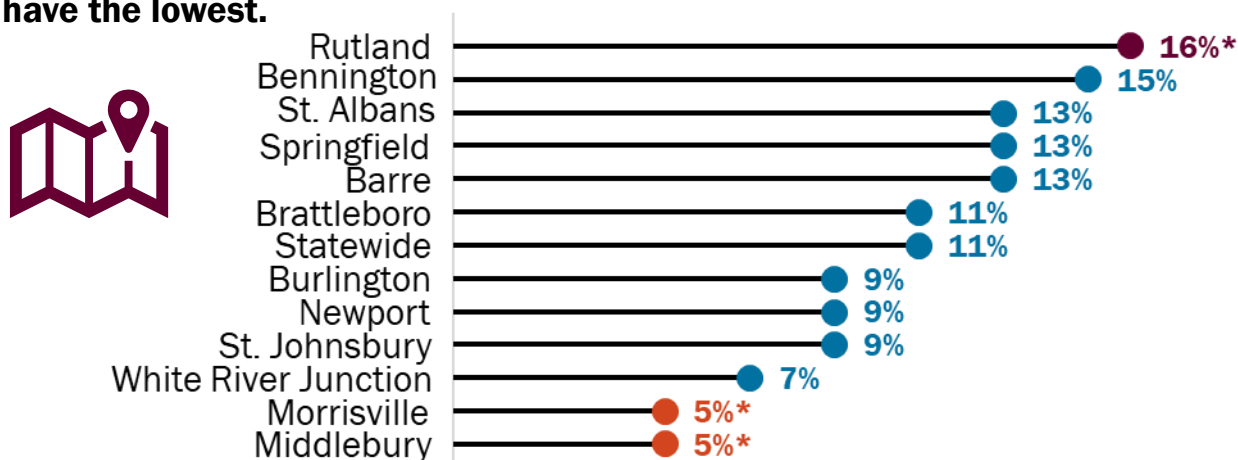


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802-863-7200

Feelings of safety vary by health district¹

Middlebury and Morrisville health districts have a **significantly lower** percentage of adults who feel slightly unsafe or not safe to walk in their community compared to the statewide prevalence. There is a **significantly higher** percentage of adults in the Rutland district who feel slightly unsafe or not safe to walk in their community, compared to the statewide prevalence.

Rutland health district has the highest percentage of adults who feel slightly or not safe to walk in their community while **Middlebury** and **Morrisville** districts have the lowest.

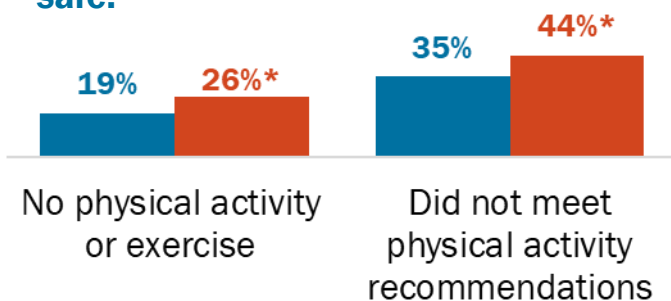


* Denotes statistical significance from statewide value

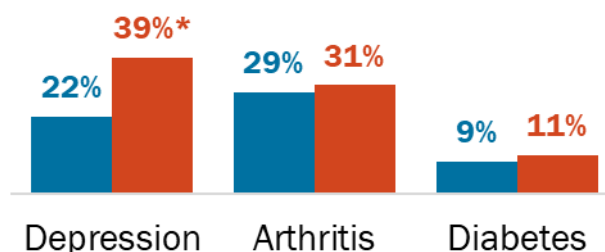
Lack of feelings of safety are associated with worse health

Adults who feel slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in their community are more likely to be less active and have a higher prevalence of depression compared to those who feel quite or extremely safe walking in their community. Feeling slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in one's community does not seem to have an impact on arthritis or diabetes risk.

Adults who feel their community is slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in are less likely to meet physical activity recommendations compared to those who feel quite or extremely safe.



Adults who feel their community is slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in have significantly higher rates of depression than those who feel quite or extremely safe.

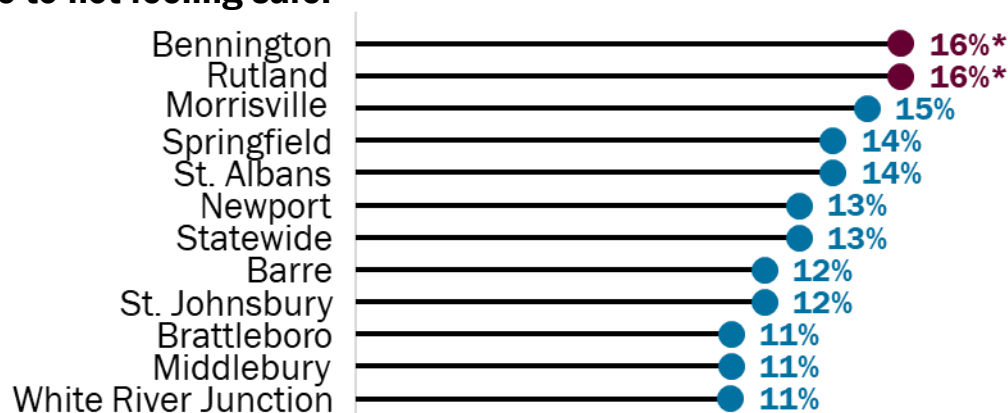


Feelings of safety and physical activity among youth

Feelings of safety

Approximately 13% of middle schoolers in Vermont reported not going to school at least once in the past 30 days due to feeling unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.

Bennington and Rutland have the highest percentage of youth who missed school due to not feeling safe.

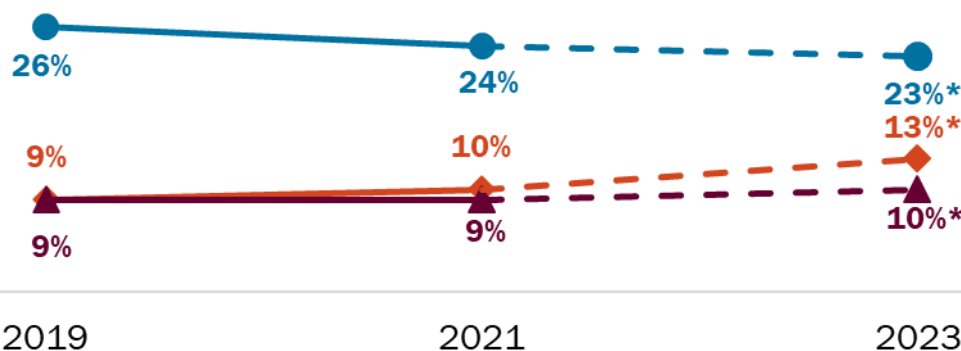


* Denotes statistical significance from statewide value

Physical activity

The percentage of middle school students who walk or ride their bike to school at least one day per week significantly decreased from 2019 to 2023. Additionally, the percentage of students who did not go to school because they felt unsafe or did not participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity at least one day in the last week increased significantly from 2019 to 2023.

The percentage of students who walk or ride their bike to school one day per week, did not go to school because they felt unsafe, and did not participate in 60 minutes of physical activity at least 1 day in the past week changed significantly from 2019 to 2023.



* Denotes statistical significance from 2019

--- The 2021 YRBS was delayed due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. For more information on how it may have impacted the 2021 results, please see [Special Considerations for 2021](#)

Key takeaways

In recent years, there have been significant changes in the number of adults and youth who feel safe being active in their community. A significantly higher percentage of adults feel slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in their community in 2023 than they did in 2017. Adults who feel slightly safe or not at all safe to walk in their community are less likely to meet physical activity recommendations and more likely to experience depression, compared to individuals who feel quite or extremely safe to walk in their community. The Rutland Health District has a significantly higher percentage of adults who feel slightly safe or not at all safe to walk, compared to Vermont overall. Furthermore, since 2019, the percentage of middle school students who did not go to school due to feeling unsafe increased significantly, and the percentage of students who engaged in physical activity and walked or biked to school in 2023 decreased significantly.

It is important to identify the reasons why Vermonters do not feel safe at school and in their communities, and if these reasons contribute to lower rates of physical activity. Increasing our understanding of these factors may inform policies and practices aimed at improving the health and perception of safety of all Vermonters.

Resources

1. For a list of health districts by town, visit: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/find-your-local-health-office>