

Vermont Adult Behavioral Risk Factor Survey

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, or BRFSS?

The BRFSS is a telephone survey of Vermont adult residents. Telephone numbers are randomly generated by a computer and we have no way of knowing whose number we are calling, or if it is a business, residential, or unlisted number.

The BRFSS is an important public health tool for measuring adult health. It does this by reaching out directly to Vermonters so that we can learn more about areas such as chronic disease prevalence, risk behaviors, demographics, health care access, and preventive behaviors.

Who can participate in the Vermont BRFSS?

The BRFSS surveys adults 18 and older who reside in Vermont. Adults who live in Vermont for 30 or more days out of the year are considered Vermont residents for the survey. Those who live in an institution, such as a nursing home, group home or prison are not eligible.

How many people are interviewed?

The number of respondents can vary from year to year. However, Vermont usually surveys between 6,000 and 7,000 adult Vermont residents annually.

Are landline and cell phone numbers called?

Yes, to make sure the survey is representative of all Vermont adults, both landline and cell phone users are surveyed.

Do all states participate in the BRFSS?

Yes, all 50 states and the District of Columbia receive funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to complete the BRFSS annually. Most U.S. territories also participate.

Can you provide town level data using the Vermont BRFSS?

No, because the survey includes only 6,000-7,000 adults each year, there are a limited number of respondents in individual towns. When the sample size, or number of respondents, is small the estimates are unreliable. For this reason, among others, we are not able to provide data at the town level.

Information can be provided at the county, hospital service area, and Health Department District Office levels.

How recent is BRFSS data?

The BRFSS is collected throughout each month in a given calendar year. At the end of the year, the data is processed and then made available for analysis. Data processing takes a few months, and the data is usually released for use by June of the following year. So, for example, 2012 Vermont BRFSS data became available in June 2013.

Who is actually calling me on the telephone?

The Health Department contracts with an organization called ICF Macro to complete the calls on our behalf. ICF Macro has an office in Burlington, Vermont, though it does employ interviewers who may be located in other states.

What types of information are gathered on the BRFSS?

The Vermont BRFSS includes questions about: chronic disease prevalence (e.g. ever diagnosed with asthma?), risk behaviors (e.g. currently smoke), demographics (e.g. gender), health care access (e.g. have health insurance), and preventive behaviors (e.g. routine visits to a doctor). Infectious disease information is not typically collected as part of the BRFSS. Data on infectious diseases is collected and reported by the department's Infectious Disease Section.

Can I request that questions be asked on the Vermont BRFSS?

Certain questions on the BRFSS are required to be asked by all states. However, states may include a limited number of additional questions. Those wanting to add questions are required to submit a formal request and meet with Vermont's BRFSS team to discuss their proposal.

The questionnaire for a given year is developed during the summer of the previous year. For example, the 2014 questionnaire was developed in the summer of 2013. If you would like to propose a question for the survey, please contact the BRFSS coordinator: ahs.vdhBRFSS@vermont.gov for more information.

Can insurance claims data, such as that from Medicaid, be linked with BRFSS data?

No. Vermont BRFSS data does not include any personal identifiers such as name, address, or social security number. While the randomly generated telephone number is used to contact a household, the number is not stored with the survey answers. We do not know who any of the respondents are, so we cannot link BRFSS survey data with that from insurance company claims.

However, that doesn't mean that data from the BRFSS can't be used alongside insurance claims data. Together, the two can be used to tell a more complete story about the health of Vermont adult residents.

My name is on the national do-not-call list. Why are you calling me?

The national do-not-call list was enacted to control telemarketing companies that sell services and products over the phone. Research calls are not included in the federal regulations that apply to telemarketing calls. The BRFSS survey is conducted for research and does not fall under current do-not-call list laws. The health department is not selling anything and you can choose to not participate, but your answers will help us to evaluate and guide important public health policy and programs.

Information about telephone consumer rights can be obtained from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) at www.fcc.gov or 202-418-0200 and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftc.gov or 202-382-4357. Information is also available from the Vermont Secretary of State: www.sec.state.vt.us/tutor/dobiz/forms/teleinfo.htm.

If I have questions about the survey, who at VDH can I contact?

Call 800-869-2871 or email ahs.vdhBRFSS@vermont.gov