

Feelings of Community Safety for Walking – Data Brief

2017 Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)

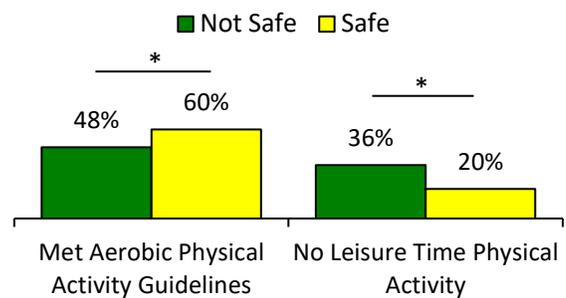
Background

Feeling safe to go out into one’s community is an important part of being physically active. Creating or enhancing access to places for physical activity, combined with informational outreach activities, are effective ways to increase physical activity and improve physical fitness among adults.¹ Access to places for physical activity can be created or enhanced both by building facilities (sidewalks, bike lanes), and by reducing barriers (e.g. clearing snow from sidewalks, slowing traffic in walkable areas). In both cases, safety concerns must be addressed for people to use the resources.

Physical Activity and Feelings of Community Safety for Walking

In 2017, nine percent of Vermont adults felt their community was not at all safe or slightly safe to walk in. Among those, 48% met aerobic physical activity guidelines,² significantly lower than the 60% of those who felt that their community was safe to walk in. Significantly more adults who felt their community was not safe to walk in engaged in no leisure time physical activity (36%) compared to the 20% who felt that it was safe. Despite when individuals live in communities that they feel unsafe to walk in, the primary form of exercise was walking or running (59%), significantly higher than the 41% who engaged in a different primary form of exercise (data not shown).

Physical Activity by Feelings of Community Safety for Walking, BRFSS 2017

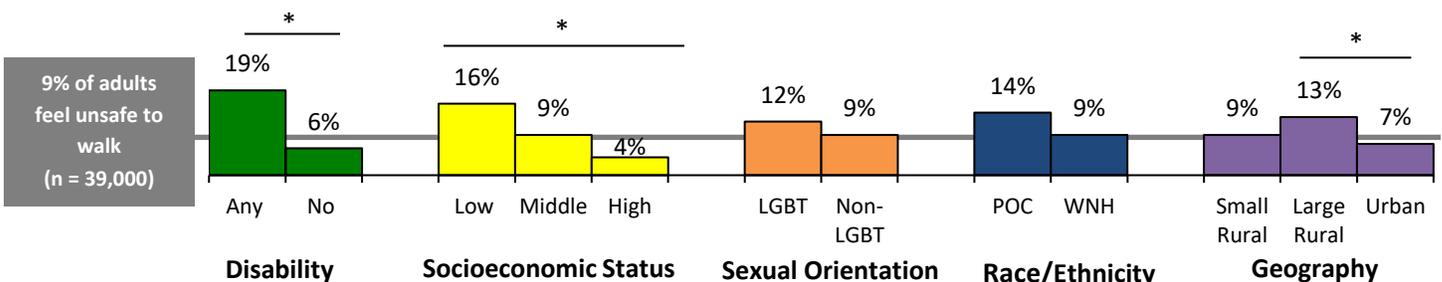


^All data are age-adjusted to the U.S. 2000 population. () notes statistically significant difference.*

Health Inequalities and Feelings of Community Safety for Walking

Vermont adults living with disabilities were more than three times as likely to feel that their community was unsafe for walking compared to those without a disability (19% vs. 6%), a significant difference. Those with a low socioeconomic status (SES) (16%) were four times as likely as those of a high SES (4%) and over one and a half times as likely as those with a middle SES (9%) to feel that their community was not safe for walking. Adults living in large rural towns/cities were more likely to feel their community was not safe for walking (13%) than those living in urban towns/cities (7%). LGBT adults and people of color (POC) had higher rates of feeling that their communities were not safe for walking than non-LGBT adults and white, non-Hispanics (WNH), though these differences were not statistically significant.

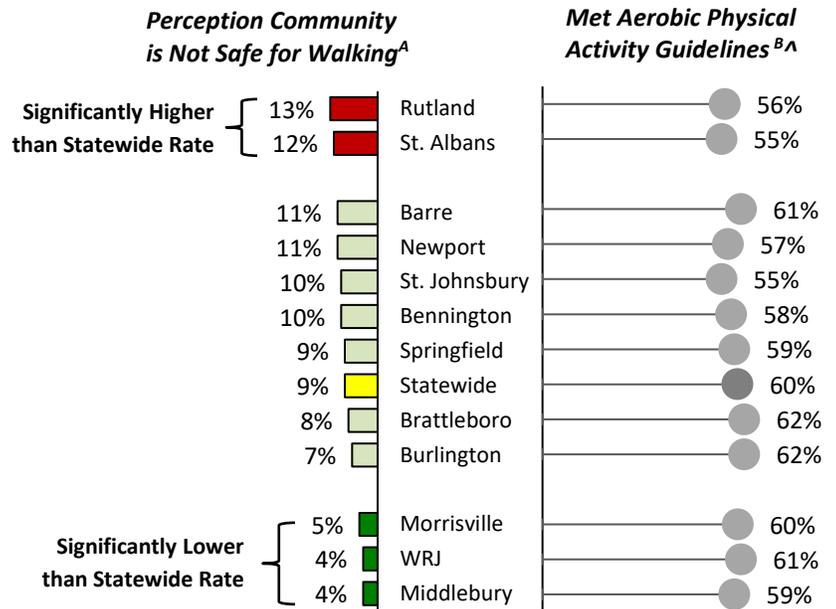
Health Inequality and Feeling That the Community Is Not Safe for Walking, BRFSS 2017



() notes statistically significant difference.*

Feelings That the Community Is Not Safe for Walking by Vermont Health District

The Rutland and St. Albans Health Districts had the highest rates of residents feeling that the community is not safe for walking and the lowest rates of meeting physical activity guidelines. St. Johnsbury adults had moderate feelings that the community is not safe for walking while having the lowest rate for meeting aerobic physical activity guidelines. The rate of Vermont adults who felt that their community is not a safe place to walk ranged from 4% in the Middlebury and White River Junction (WRJ) to 13% in Rutland. The Middlebury, WRJ, and Morrisville Health Districts had significantly lower rates than the state while St. Albans and Rutland were significantly higher.



Source: Vermont BRFSS ^A2011/17; ^B2015/17.

[^] Data are age-adjusted to the U.S. 2000 population.

Discussion

While the data support a connection between the feeling that their community is not safe for walking and level of physical activity, there are many reasons why someone may feel unsafe to walk in their community. Some reasons could be: condition or lack of sidewalks, poor or no street lighting, unsafe crossings, traffic speeds, or concerns about real or perceived crime or dangerous animals. To better understand the reasons Vermonters may feel unsafe to walk in their community, the following questions can help start conversations about community safety and help plan for improvements.

Questions to ask of people in your community

- Why do you feel unsafe in your community to walk?
- Are there places where you feel safer or less safe, and if so, what contributes to that?
- What is needed to help you feel safer?

Use the answers to these questions to develop a plan to make improvements. Contact your Office of Local Health (<http://www.healthvermont.gov/local>) for assistance and resources.

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Data Notes

Not safe for walking was defined as those responding “not at all safe” or “slightly safe” to the question: Overall, how would you rate your community as a safe place to walk? Geographic classification was determined using Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes which classify U.S. census tracts using measures of population density, urbanization, and daily commuting. VT towns were stratified into three tiers (Categorization B): urban, large rural town (large rural), and small/isolated rural town (small rural) (<http://depts.washington.edu/uwruca/ruca-uses.php>).

¹ The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide), <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/sites/default/files/assets/PA-Environmental-Enhanced-Access.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. 2008. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (<https://health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/>).