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NEW FINDINGS SHOW PROMISING TRENDS IN HAWAII STUDENT HEALTH BEHAVIORS

HONOLULU – Today the Hawaii State Department of Health, Department of Education (HIDOE), and University of Hawaii released high school data from the [2015 Hawaii Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) for the state and all four counties. The YRBS is a bi-annual survey that regularly monitors the health risk behaviors of public, non-charter school students statewide. Over 12,000 Hawaii students in grades 6 through 12 participated in the 2015 survey.

Topics covered in the survey include unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity. The survey also monitors the percentages of students affected by obesity and asthma.

“The results reflect our recent initiatives to raise the bar at all levels in education,” said Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi. “The downward trend of students engaging in risky behaviors and an increase in healthy choices is testament to the work done by our schools and the commitment of our students to strive higher.”

The 2015 YRBS results show trends towards less-risky behaviors in many important areas, and highlight needed improvements in others:

Physical fighting continues to decline, with 15 percent of high school students reporting that they were in a fight at least once during the 12 months before the survey. Bullying has stayed relatively steady, with 1 in 5 high school students reporting that they were bullied on school property during the same time period.

Consistent with objectives outlined in the State’s [Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan](#), many YRBS indicators suggest an increase in youth behaviors that support healthy lifestyles. Only 13 percent of high school students report drinking at least one can, bottle, or glass of soda or pop at least once per day, compared to 23 percent in 2007. The

survey does not cover drinking other types of beverages with added sugar such as sports drinks, energy drinks, fruit drinks (other than 100 percent fruit juice) or sweetened tea and coffee. The proportion of high school students meeting physical activity recommendations remains steady, with 20 percent achieving the national recommendation of at least 60 minutes per day on each of the seven days before the survey. However, sedentary time continues to increase, with 2 in 5 high school students spending three hours or more per day playing video games or using a computer for non-school purposes.

Alcohol use has declined among Hawaii's youth, with 1 in 4 high school students reporting that they drank alcohol within the 30 days before the survey. Similarly, we continue to see steady declines in smoking; 90 percent of Hawaii's high school students do not smoke cigarettes. However, many have tried using electronic smoking devices, with 1 in 4 reporting that they currently use electronic smoking devices.

"This data shows that we are improving as a state in many areas," said Director of Health Virginia Pressler. "However, the sharp rise in the use of electronic cigarettes reminds us of the importance of continually monitoring student behavior. We will continue to work in partnership with HIDOE to ensure that our programs and interventions target these emerging issues."

One area that remains a concern is adolescent mental health. In 2015, 29.5 percent of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row at least once in their lifetime. Rates of attempted suicide over the past 12 months has steadily decreased since 1993, but remain unacceptably high at 11 percent.

Survey procedures protect students' privacy by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. The data is gathered from students in public high schools across the State of Hawaii. In a change from the previous years' survey administration, parents were offered the opportunity to "opt-out," rather than requiring a form to "opt-in" to the process. This resulted in a 30 to 40 percent increase in response rate, providing a more comprehensive picture of student behavior across the state and all four counties.

The Hawaii YRBS is part of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). National YRBS survey results were also released today by CDC. For a comparison of Hawaii's data to national rates, please visit <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>.

For more information on the Hawaii YRBS, visit <http://apps.hidoe.k12.hi.us/research/Pages/YRBS.aspx>.

The full survey report, including more detailed data reports by county, gender, grade and race/ethnicity, and the survey questionnaires are available at the www.hawaiihealthmatters.org.

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