

Hawai'i's Teens

Center on the Family

College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawaii



Photo: Courtesy of the Honolulu Star Bulletin

In Hawai'i, there are over 98,600 teens who are 12 to 17 years old.

Each day, 365 days a year...

- 12,528 live in poverty
- 26,634 live with only one parent
- 9,865 of those aged 16-19 are not in school *and* are not working
- 10,446 under the age of 18 are in school *and* are working
- 23,500 or more are reading well, above average on the S.A.T.
- 27,000 or more do well in math, above average on the S.A.T.
- 7,227 receive assistance through special education programs
- 3,266 speak limited English and receive assistance through special classes
- 9,569 are absent from public schools
- 31,516 vigorously exercise
- 20,814 eat a good diet, including fruit
- 16,227 smoke
- 2,269 drink alcohol daily, and 32,060 drink beer or wine at some time each month
- 5 seniors drop out of school
- 4 girls under the age of 18 learn that they are pregnant
- 2 are abused and/or neglected
- 8 are arrested for serious crimes, and 28 are arrested in all, of which half are for curfew violations or for running away

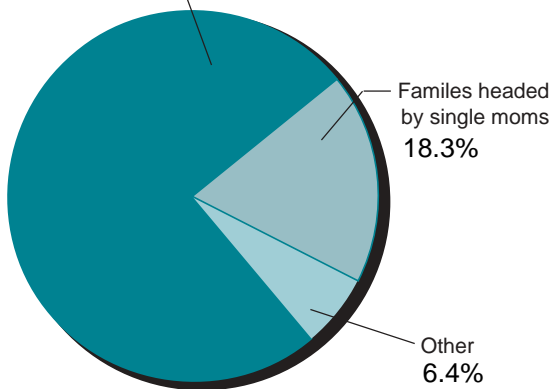
DEMOGRAPHICS

What characteristics best describe Hawai'i's teens?

- 8.1% of Hawai'i's population, or 98,646 young people, are between the ages of 12 and 17. The 2000 census showed a 17% increase over 1990, when this group constituted 7.5% of the population.
- The Department of Education reports that more than 25% of public school students identify themselves as Hawaiian or Part-Hawaiian.
- Nearly 13% of Hawai'i's teens live below the federal poverty level.
- More than 32% (nearly twice the rate of 1990) of Hawai'i's high school students receive free and reduced price lunch at school. Eligibility is based on 185% of the federal poverty level.
- More than 7% of young people ages 14 to 15 work.
- More than 24% of youth ages 16 to 17 work.
- About 10% of Hawai'i's teens ages 16 to 19 are "idle" (that is, not working and not enrolled in school). This is higher than the national average of 8%.

Family Households with Own Children Under 18

Two-parent families, at least 1 biological parent
75.3%



RELATIONSHIPS

How do local teens relate to their families and community?

Almost half of our teens live in nurturing and supportive families and communities that support resiliency and encourage a healthy trajectory toward adulthood. From the 2000 Hawai'i student alcohol, tobacco and other drug use study we learn:

- Almost 46% enjoy spending time with their parents and report that their parents acknowledge them for doing well.
- More than 91% regularly spend time visiting with relatives.
- Almost 43% report that their neighbors provide encouragement for adolescents engaging in positive activities.

Almost half of our island teens live in family and community environments that place them at risk for multiple social, educational, and health problems. Exposure to multiple risks can seriously derail youth on their journey to responsible adulthood. From the same study:

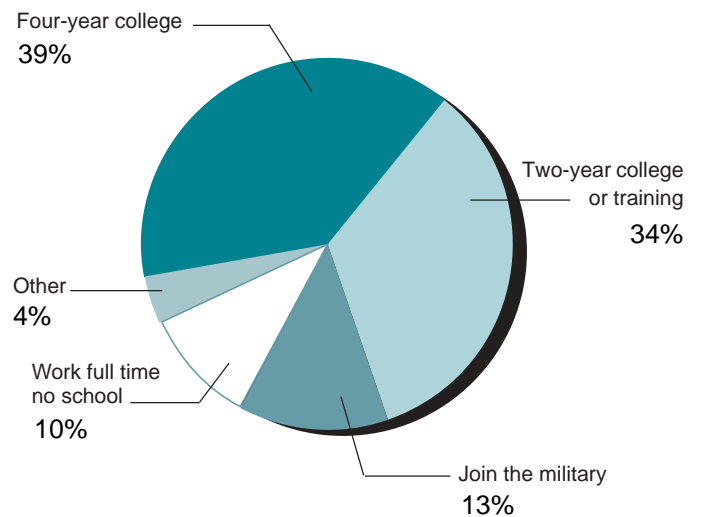
- Almost 42% report that they frequently experience yelling, insults, and unresolved arguments at home.
- More than 46% report that their parents fail to monitor their whereabouts or set clear expectations.
- Almost 44% report that they don't feel safe in their neighborhoods due to problems with graffiti, fights, drugs, and other crimes.
- Almost 39% report a lack of connection to their communities and a desire to move elsewhere.
- More than 45% report that their friends condone antisocial behaviors such as stealing, fighting, hurting others intentionally, playing hooky from school, carrying guns to school, or using cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs.

What are the educational achievements and goals of Hawai'i's youth?

Learning is the major activity of all children. In the teen years, they are building on the basic skills of elementary school, reinforcing attitudes toward learning that will be part of their life pattern. Hawai'i students exhibit great variability in their understanding of the importance of education and in their performance.

- From 1990 to 2000, the average daily attendance rate for public high school students has remained steady at about 90%.
- More than 45% of teens ages 12 to 17 report a lack of interest in or commitment to school
- Almost 13% of public school middle and high school students were enrolled in special education classes in 2000, about one-third more than in 1998.
- More than 6% of public school students have limited proficiency in English.
- Less than 20% of Hawai'i's public school 8th graders scored above average on the Stanford Achievement Test of Reading compared to 23% nationally.
- Almost 23% of Hawai'i's 8th graders scored above average on the math test, comparable to national norms.
- Of Hawai'i's seniors who took the SAT I in 2001, 67% were from public schools, 16% from religiously affiliated schools, and 17% from independent schools. The mean score was 486 in verbal and 515 in math, compared to national means of 506 and 514 respectively.
- The top three intended college majors of Hawai'i's college-bound seniors who took the 2001 SAT I (public and private school) were health and allied sciences (17%), business and commerce (13%), and engineering (10%). Approximately 8% were undecided about their major.

2001 Public High School Seniors' Future Plans



HEALTH & SAFETY

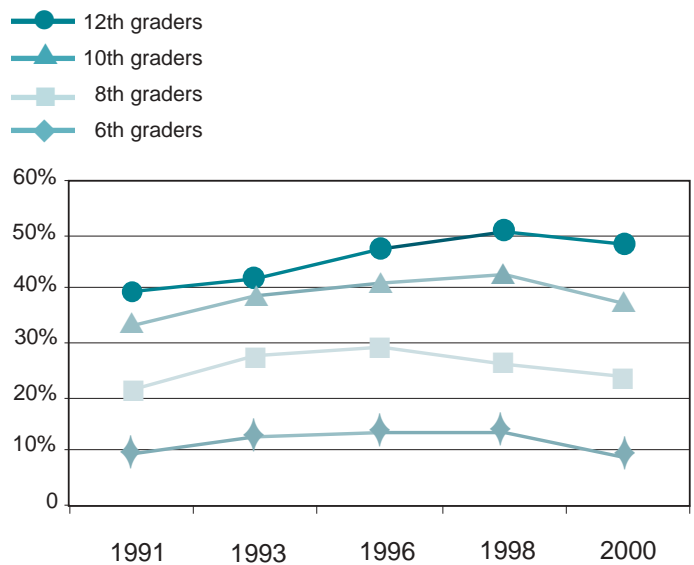
How safe are our teens? What are the health conditions and behaviors of youth in Hawai'i?

While there are variations in health and safety outcomes in teens of differing ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, gender, and neighborhood, the overall picture is good. On most measures there have been recent improvements in rates that are already better than their peers across the nation. Clearly there are still troublesome signals: too many feel unsafe in school, too many experience early initiation into sexual activity or trying alcohol or tobacco. However, this is the area in which parents and the community can have the most influence in protecting our youth.

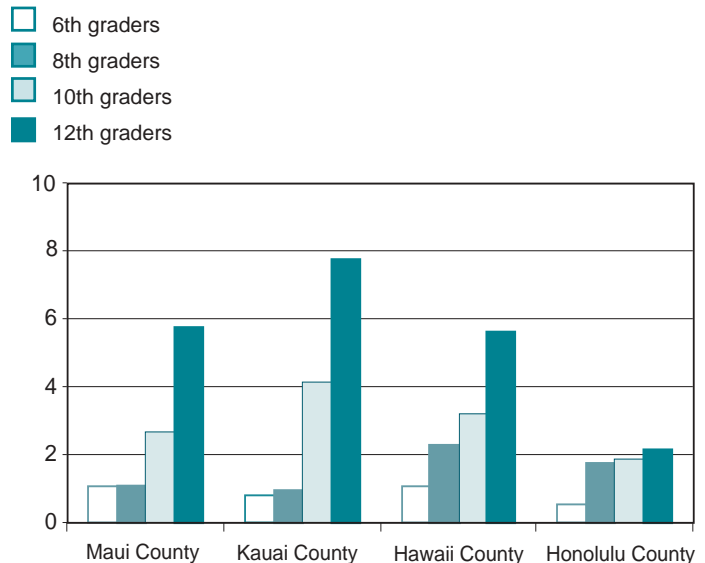
- Of surveyed parents of public school students, almost 69% have confidence in the safety and well-being of their children at school. But of the students surveyed, only 44% of the middle school students and 47% of the high school students reported the same sense of safety.
- About 23 teens per 100,000 die violently each year in Hawai'i, either by suicide or as victims of accidents or crime. This is the lowest rate of any state, with the national average being 53 per 100,000.
- Hawai'i has the highest rate in the nation of teens who are so depressed that they seriously considered committing suicide. Twice as many Hawai'i girls than boys reported suicidal thinking in the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). Yet the rate of completed suicides is below the national average and has been declining in recent years.
- Also in the 1999 YRBS, 64% of teens reported participating in vigorous exercise regularly while only 21% claimed to eat a healthy diet.
- Since 1990, Hawai'i has experienced a 29% decrease in births to teens ages 15 to 17, a decline better than the national average. In 2000, 22.7 female teens per 1,000 (or 542 young women in this age group) gave birth; there were 18 births to girls under the age of 15.
- The reported number of chlamydia cases has nearly doubled in Hawai'i since 1997 and 25% of those cases are attributed to youth ages 15 to 19.

- Alcohol, tobacco, and other substance use and abuse remain a serious problem in Hawai'i. However, the rates have trended slightly downward since the peak in 1996, and Hawai'i is doing better overall than the national average.

Percent of Hawaii Teens by Grade Who Ever Tried Illicit Drugs



Percent of Students Who Reported Drinking Daily in 2000



A Developmental View of the Teen Years

Adolescence is a time for both opportunities and challenges, when youth rapidly and dramatically change physically, psychologically, and socially. Because development during this period is uneven, adolescents may experience some confusion about who they are and who they want to become. Some “try on” different identities by changing the clothes they wear, dying their hair, or piercing their body parts. Others test the limits of what parents, teachers, and community members will tolerate. For the most part, these expressions of individuality are innocent experimentation, but some acting out is associated with extreme behaviors that place our youth at risk for negative outcomes.

Peers exert a far greater influence during this time than at any other period of development. Adolescents engage in an ongoing struggle between conformity (to gain approval) and individuation. Internalized beliefs are consolidated for the formation of character and ethical values that will shape their decisions for years to come. Girls tend to focus on the inter-dependence of relationships, while boys may concern themselves more with rights and justice.

Parents may feel that their teens are pushing them away, but in reality, this is a time when kids need their parents more than ever to support and guide them. Teens must manage a multitude of new responsibilities and choices related to pressures to succeed in school, plans for the future, driving and employment, emerging sexuality, and drugs and alcohol, among others. They are learning

how to achieve goals, resolve disputes, compete fairly, and cope with victory and defeat. With their newly developed thinking and reasoning skills, teens may feel as if they can handle anything, but their lack of experience sometimes gets them into surprising or risky situations.

Though stereotypes abound regarding the chaos and turbulence of the transition from middle childhood to young adulthood, the majority of teens will sail through this period with not much more than the occasional bruised ego if given just the right amount of support from their

parents and the other adults in their lives. Though teens may want to stretch the ties that bind them to family and other caring adults, most kids don't want to sever those ties completely, and they are at risk if they do. The emotional glue of family love and community connectedness is the stabilizing influence teens need to gain resilience in the midst of risk and uncertainty.

This profile describes the current status of teens in Hawai'i, youth ages 12 to 17. Understanding who our young people are and the conditions

in which they live enables us to determine the kind of support they need. With the right guidance from caring adults, most young people can become healthy, happy, and successful citizens who will be assets to our communities.

For more detailed information, see the Data Center for Children and Families at www.uhfamily.hawaii.edu, especially the School Community Profiles and Drug Prevention SIG sections.





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