



# Youth Risk Behavior Survey Background and Rationale

Presented by:  
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and Cambridge Health Alliance



Cambridge Health Alliance  
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# YRBS Background

- In the 1990's the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began funding state and local school health programs
- They needed accurate information about specific youth behaviors to assess programs
- The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was developed to monitor behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability and social problems among youth in the United States



# YRBS Content

- The YRBS asks about behaviors that are strongly related to health outcomes:
  - Violence and unintentional injuries
  - Tobacco use
  - Alcohol and other drug use
  - Sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancies and STDs, including HIV
  - Weight management and dietary behaviors
  - Physical activity
- These behaviors are often related and usually begin during adolescence and young adulthood
- Over the years, questions have been added or removed to reflect changing national health priorities



# YRBS Validity

- The YRBS is an evidence-based survey with clear research behind it showing that self-reported behaviors from adolescents are both valid and reliable<sup>1</sup>
- Communities can use the YRBS at the local level
  - Guidance is available from the CDC to ensure standards are followed and the validity of survey results is maintained
- Important factors that maintain the validity of the results
  - Students know that the survey is important
  - Students feel their privacy is protected
  - Survey procedures are standardized and meet CDC guidelines
  - Data is checked prior to analysis according to CDC guidelines



<sup>1</sup> Brener JD, Journal Adolescent Health 2002 & 2003

# YRBS Utility

- Communities can use YRBS results in a many ways
  - Determine the extent of risk behaviors
  - Determine the perception vs. reality of student behavior
  - Track changes in risk behaviors over time
  - Create awareness among school administrators, parents, boards of education, community members, school staff, students, etc
  - Set goals for community or school health programs
  - Develop school health programs and policies
  - Monitor success or failure of programs or policies
  - Inform instructional guides and materials and professional development programs for teachers
  - Support health-related legislation
  - Support funding requests to federal, state, and private agencies and foundations



# Middle School YRBS

- The middle school YRBS questionnaire was modeled on the high school YRBS questionnaire with some modifications for the age group
  - Response categories are simpler
    - *Example:* Students answer “yes” or “no” to the high risk behavior questions rather than reporting the “number of days” or “number of times”
  - High risk behaviors are covered less extensively
    - *Example:* 5 sexual health questions on Middle School Survey compared to 15 questions on the High School Survey



# Middle School YRBS

- There is no evidence that simply asking students about health risk behaviors will encourage them to try that behavior <sup>1</sup>
- Similarly
  - Comprehensive sex education has not been shown to increase the sexual behavior of students<sup>2,3,4</sup>
  - There is no evidence that talking to youth about suicidal thoughts or behavior is harmful<sup>5,6</sup>
  - Exposure to school-based prevention programs is related to a lower rate of use of illicit drugs<sup>7</sup>



# Middle School YRBS in Malden

- The YRBS has been conducted in Malden since 1999 for High School and since 2004 for Middle School
- The last round of the Middle School YRBS was 2008
- The *Well Being of Malden Youth 2009* Report highlighted areas of concern

YRBS Data	Middle School (2008)	High School (2007)
Seriously Considered Suicide	20%	13%
Hurt Self on Purpose (i.e. cutting)	n/a	17%
Depressed Mood	n/a	30%
Ever had Sexual Intercourse	18%	47%
Condom Used at Last Intercourse	62%	60%
Ever injected illegal drug into body	2%	2%

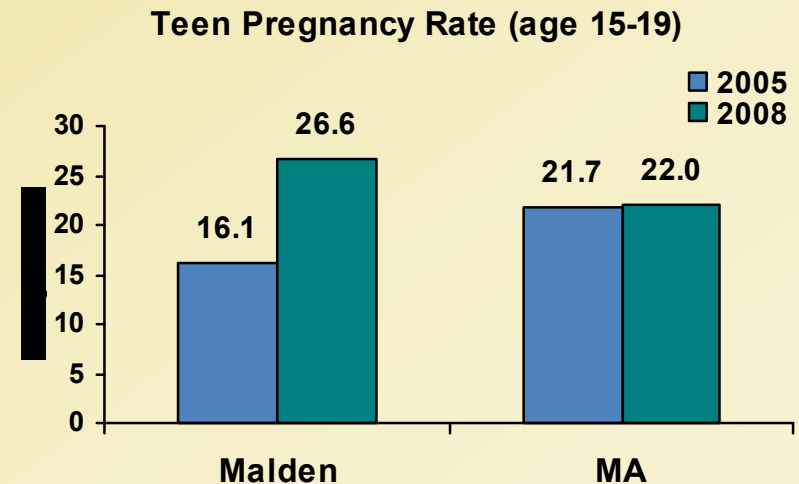
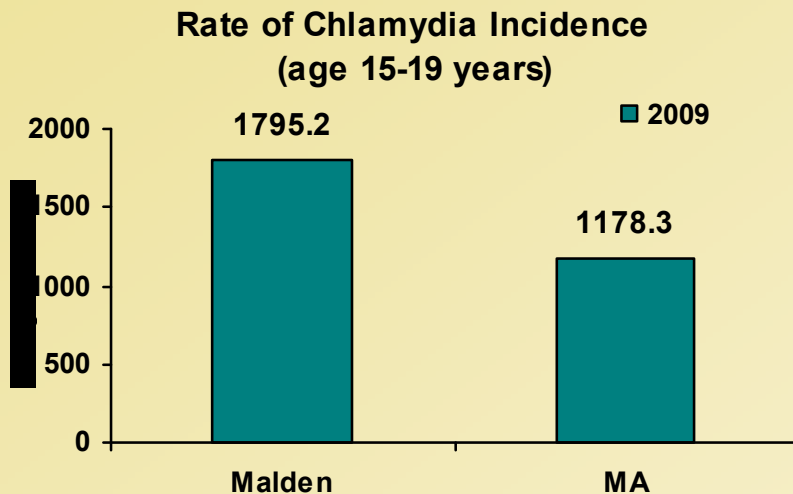
n/a = Question was not included on Middle School Survey





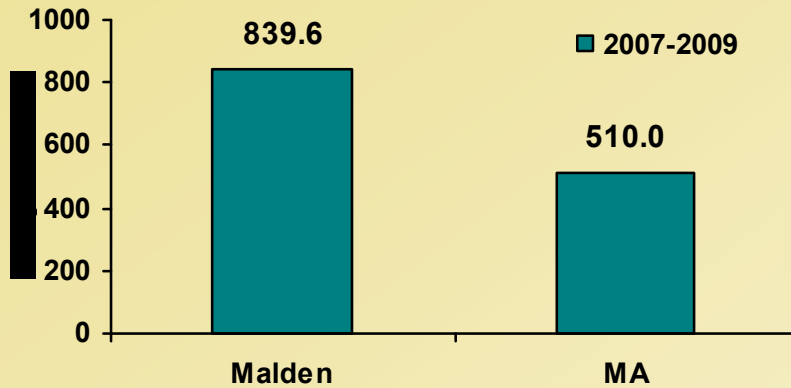
# Other Data in Malden

- Data from MA Department of Public Health (*Well Being of Malden Youth 2009 Report*) confirmed the concerns highlighted from YRBS data

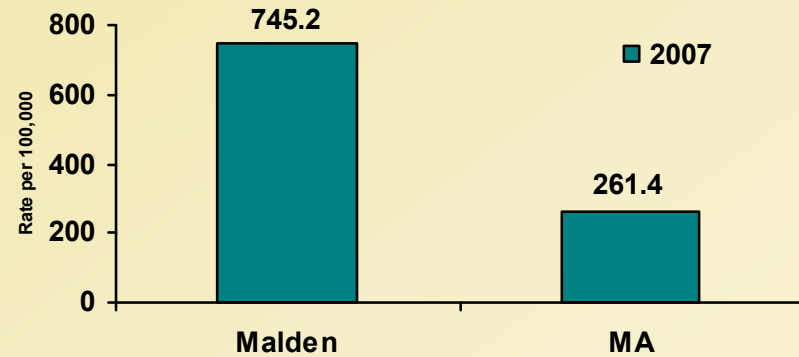


# Other Data in Malden

Rate of Hospitalizations for Mental Disorders (age 10-19 years)



Rate of Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment for Heroin (age 15-19 years)



# Current YRBS in Malden

- Recent YRBS surveys in High School (2012) and Middle School (pending) will
  - Help determine the direction of student behaviors since 2007/2008
  - Help interpret the public health data regularly reported by the department of public health



# Summary

- The YRBS is an evidence-based tool
- Long history of use in Malden at both High School and Middle School level
- No evidence that participation in the YRBS leads to change in student risk behavior
- Results are used in a large number of ways that can directly benefit student health

