



# Rhode Island Data Brief

## 2011 RI High School Disabilities & Health Risks

**Purpose:** Over 25% of Rhode Island (RI) public high school students had a disability in 2011. This Brief examines if those students were in greater jeopardy from risk behaviors than their peers without disability, and whether those risks have improved or worsened over time (2007 to 2011). Twenty four measures<sup>1</sup> are evaluated, comprising eight areas of vulnerability (violence, mental health, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sex, injury, and weight). The findings are intended to inform interested parties and stimulate further research.

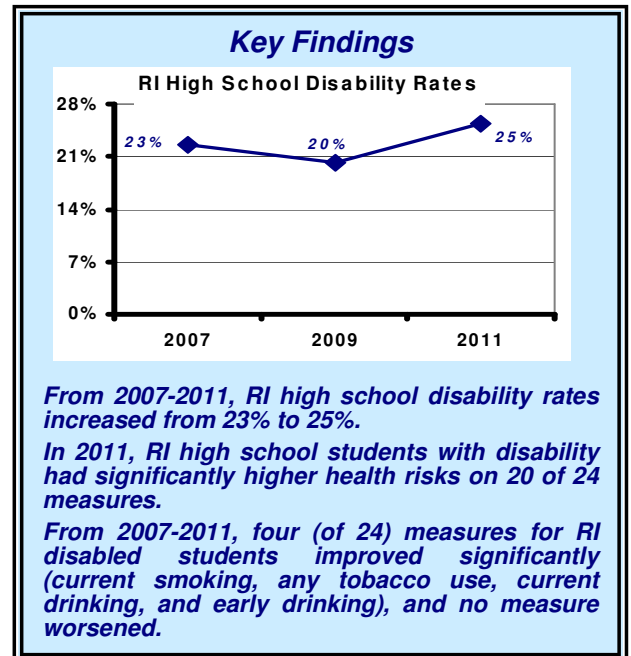
**Using the Information:** In this Brief, the relationship between disability and risk behaviors is one of association, not causation (e.g., students with disability were twice as likely to smoke than students without disability, but having a disability doesn't cause a student to smoke). In addition, the differences in the health risks for students with and without disability may be statistically 'significant' or not.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, the 24 risk measures are all unfavorable indicators, so lower/declining values are preferred.

**RI High School Students with Disability:** Students were surveyed on whether they had any long-term (6+ months) physical and/or emotional/learning disabilities. Statewide, high school disability rates increased from 22.6% in 2007 to 25.3% in 2011 (however, the increase was not large enough to be statistically significant<sup>2</sup>). Demographically, students with disabilities were similar to their non-disabled peers. There were no significant differences in their gender makeup, minority status or ages. However, students with disability were more likely to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual (14% vs. 5%), and to have poor academic grades ('D' & 'F' grades were 14% vs. 6% for the non-disabled).

**Findings:** In 2011, RI students with disability had significantly higher health risks on 20 of 24 measures than non-disabled students (Chart 1). From 2007-2011, four risk measures for disabled students improved significantly (current smoking, any tobacco use, current drinking, and early drinking before age 13), and no measure worsened (Chart 2). Select risk disparities include:

- The **physical fighting** rate was higher for disabled students in 2011 (30% vs. 20%), and **dating violence** was over two times more common (14% vs. 6%).
- The **forced intercourse** rate was almost three times higher for disabled students in 2011 (13% vs. 5%).
- Two and a half times more disabled students **felt 'depressed'** in 2011 (42% vs. 17%), and their **attempted suicide** rate was over three times higher (17% vs. 5%).
- **Current smoking** among disabled students decreased from 27% to 18% (2007-2011), but was over twice as high for these students in 2011 (18% vs. 8%). Likewise, **any tobacco use** among this group fell from 32% to 23% (2007-2011), but remained significantly higher in 2011 (23% vs. 15%).
- Disabled students' **current drinking** rates declined from 51% in 2007 to 40% in 2011, but remained higher than the non-disabled rate in 2011 (40% vs. 31%). **Binge drinking** was also higher for students with disabilities in 2011 (25% vs. 17%).
- **Marijuana use** was higher for students with disability in 2011 (33% vs. 24%). These students were over four times as likely to have **tried cocaine** (13% vs. 3%), and over twice as likely to have **abused prescription drugs** (24% vs. 10%).
- The **current sexual activity** rate was higher for disabled students in 2011 (35% vs. 29%). They were also more likely to have had **multiple sexual partners** (14% vs. 9%), and **unprotected sex** (50% vs. 35%).
- Almost twice as many disabled students did **not wear seat belts** in 2011 (15% vs. 8%), and they were almost three times as likely to **drink and drive** (11% vs. 4%).

Students with disabilities can be healthy and well, and addressing their negative health risk disparities will help improve the quality of life for youth of all different abilities.



<sup>1</sup> Data are from RI's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, part of a biennial national survey of public high school students on the major causes of disease and injury morbidity and mortality (for more information contact Bruce Cryan, 401-222-5111, [www.health.ri.gov/data/youthriskbehaviorsurvey/](http://www.health.ri.gov/data/youthriskbehaviorsurvey/))

<sup>2</sup> As the RI-YRBS is a sample survey, if the 95% Confidence Intervals of two values overlap, one may not conclude (with 95% certainty) that there was a statistically 'significant' difference between the two values (i.e., the difference could be due to sampling bias)

Chart 1: RI 2011 High School Health Risks by Disability Status

\* statistically significant differences

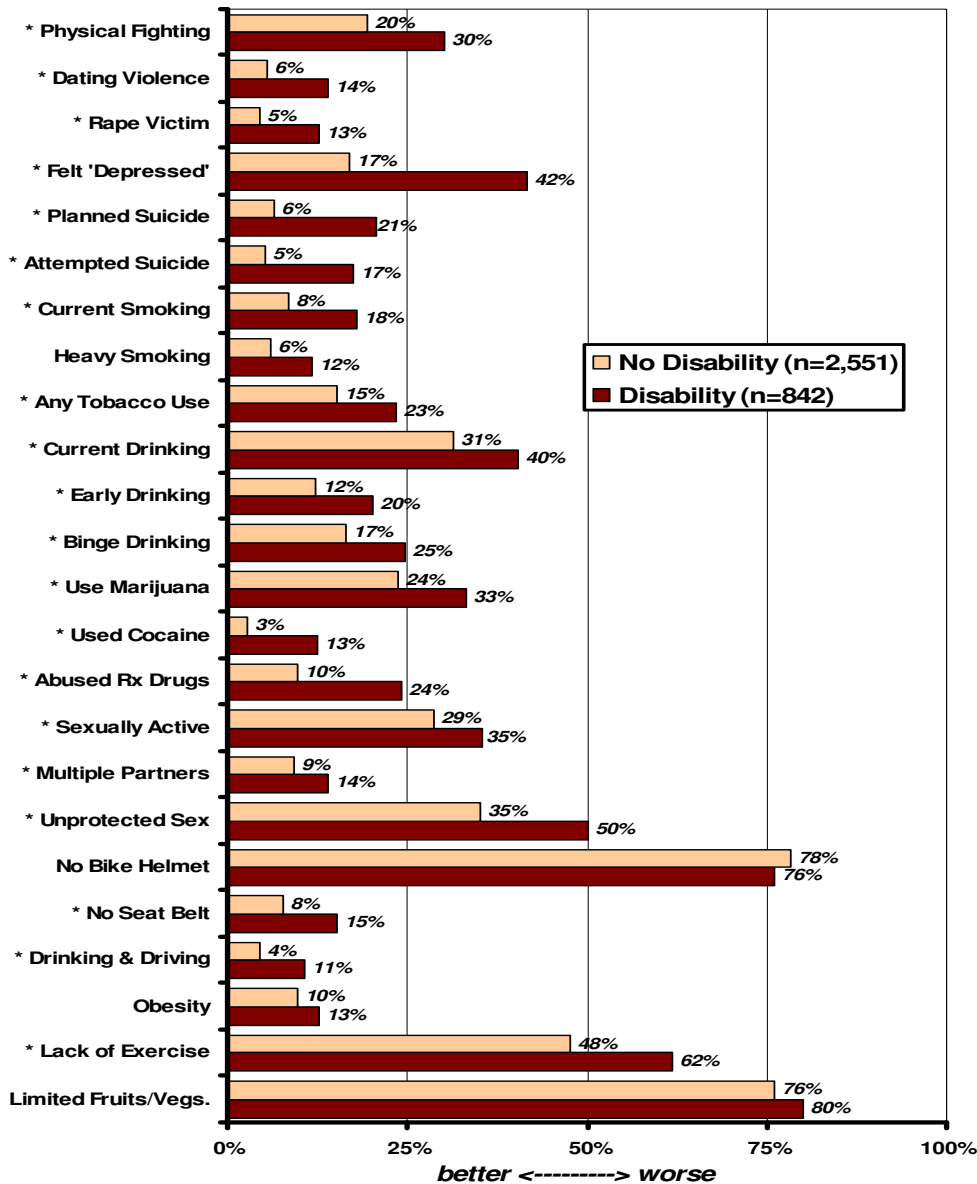
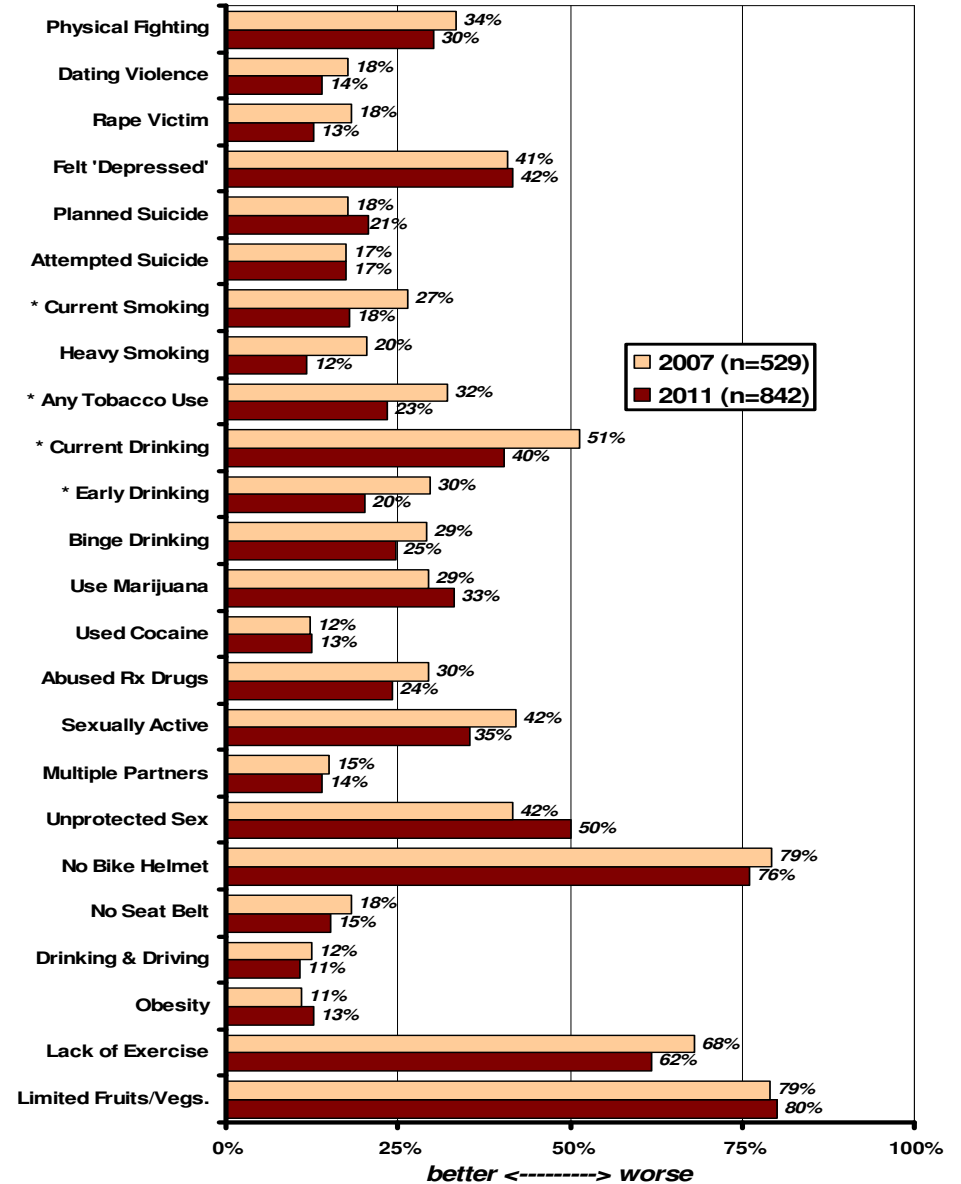


Chart 2: RI 2007 & 2011 H.S. Health Risks for Students with Disability

\* statistically significant changes



**VIOLENCE MEASURES:** *Physical Fighting* (1+ times in the past yr.); *Dating Violence* (physically abused by partner in the past yr.); *Rape Victim* (forced into sexual intercourse, ever); **MENTAL HEALTH MEASURES:** *Felt 'Depressed'* (for 2+ wks. in the past yr.); *Planned Suicide* (in the past yr.); *Attempted Suicide* (1+ times in the past yr.); **TOBACCO MEASURES:** *Current Smoking* (smoked on 1+ days in the past mo.); *Heavy Smoking* (10+ cigarettes on the days smoked, in the past mo.); *Any Tobacco Use* (used chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or smoked cigars or cigarettes in the past mo.); **ALCOHOL MEASURES:** *Current Drinking* (on 1+ days in the past mo.); *Early Drinking* (1st alcohol drink before age 13); *Binge Drinking* (5+ drinks, on 1+ days in the past mo.); **DRUG USE MEASURES:** *Use Marijuana* (1+ times in the past mo.); *Used Cocaine* (used any form of cocaine, 1+ times, ever); *Abused Rx Drugs* (without a prescription, 1+ times, ever); **SEXUAL ACTIVITY MEASURES:** *Sexually Active* (1+ sexual partner(s) in the past 3 mos.); *Multiple Partners* (4+ sexual partners, ever); *Unprotected Sex* (no condom used, last sexual encounter); **INJURY MEASURES:** *No Bike Helmet* (never or rarely wore a helmet in the past yr.); *No Seat Belt* (never or rarely wore a seat belt in the past yr.); *Drinking & Driving* (1+ times in the past mo.); **WEIGHT RELATED MEASURES:** *Obesity* (over the 95th percentile for BMI); *Lack of Exercise* (less than 1 hr. on fewer than 5 days in the past wk.); *Limited Fruits/Vegs.* (less than 5 servings per day in the past wk.)